ABHISHIKTĀNANDA'S NON-MONISTIC ADVAITIC EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

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The French Benedictine monk Henri Le Saux (Abhishiktānanda) sought to establish an Indian Christian monasticism, emphasizing Hindu *advaitic* experience. He understood *advaita* as both nondual and non-monistic. Using phenomenology and comparative philosophy, this thesis explores his understanding and experience of *advaita*, comparing it to both traditional Hinduism and neo-Vedānta, as well as to Christianity and Zen Buddhism. Abhishiktānanda's description of his experience is examined in relation to perception, thinking, action, ontology and theology. Special attention is given to comparing the views of the Hindu sages Ramaṇa Maharshi and Gnānānanda, both of whom influenced Abhishiktānanda.

Abhishiktānanda believed that *advaita* must be directly experienced; this experience is beyond all words and concepts. He compares Christian apophatic mysticism and Hindu *sannyāsa*. This thesis examines his distinction between experience and thought in relation to recent philosophical discussions.

Abhishiktānanda radically reinterprets Christianity. His affirmation of both nonduality and non-monism was influenced by Christian Trinitarianism, interpreted as an emanation of the Many from the One. Jesus' experience of Sonship with the Father is an *advaitic* experience that is equally available to everyone. Abhishiktānanda believes that the early Upanishads report a similar experience. A monistic interpretation of *advaita* only developed later with the "dialectics" of Shankara's disciples. In non-monistic *advaita*, the world is not an illusion. Using ideas derived from *tantra* and Kashmir *Śaivism*, Abhishiktānanda interprets *māyā* as the *śakti* or power of Shiva. He compares *śakti* to the Holy Spirit.

Abhishiktānanda distinguishes between a pure consciousness experience (*nirvikalpa* or *kevala samādhi*) and a return to the world of diversity in *sahaja samādhi*. Ramaṇa and Gnānānanda make a similar distinction. *Sahaja samādhi* is the state of the *jīvanmukti*, the one who is liberated while still in the body; it is an experience that is referred to in *tantra* and in Kashmir *Śaivism*. Abhishiktānanda never experienced *nirvikalpa samādhi*, but he did experience *sahaja samādhi*.

The appendix provides one possible synthesis of Abhishiktānanda's understanding of *advaita* using the ideas of C.G. Jung.

Key words: Abhishiktananda, Le Saux, Ramana, Gnanananda, advaita, nondualism, non-monistic, mysticism, Hindu-Christian, Jung.

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Professor Julius Lipner of Cambridge University first introduced me to the writings of Abhishiktānanda. Dr. Harold Coward of the University of Victoria encouraged me to write my doctoral thesis about Abhishiktānanda's experience. I am also grateful to Dr. Ron Neufeldt of the University of Calgary for referring me to sources on neo-Hinduism and modern interpretations of Vedānta.

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My wife Sabine Moritz accompanied me on my visit to India. She has encouraged me not only in writing of this thesis but in pursuing the spirituality that is its subject. Sabine has herself researched spirituality from the perspective of its application in alternative medicine.

Our teenage children Skye and Luke watched with interest as my research progressed, asking interesting questions about the religious traditions involved. Just at the time that I was completing this thesis, we adopted little Zoë Huong from Viet Nam. The Buddhist tradition of her country is a reminder to us of the increasing religious pluralism of our world. I hope that our children will find the religious meeting point that is evident in Abhishiktānanda's experience.

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I. Introduction

A. A Brief Biography of Abhishiktānanda

The twentieth century saw levels of interaction between religious traditions unparalleled in the history of religions. Two such traditions that had long been separated by geography and ideology were Catholic Christianity and Hinduism. In few instances can the dynamic interaction between these two be seen more clearly than in the life of Abhishiktānanda.

Abhishiktānanda means "Bliss of the Anointed One, the Lord." It is the name that was used in India by the French Benedictine monk Henri Le Saux.[1] There is an ambiguity in this name, an ambiguity that perhaps reflects the tension felt by Abhishiktānanda in reconciling his Hindu *advaitic* experience with his Christian religious experience. Panikkar says that the name means, "He whose joy is the Lord's anointed, Christ."[2] That would suggest the joy of devotion to Christ. Or the name may mean "He who *is* the bliss of the Lord's Anointed", thus going beyond devotion to Christ to an actual sharing of Christ's experience. This second meaning is more in keeping with Abhishiktānanda's emphasis on the importance of this experience for himself.[3] Christ's 'anointing' was his experience of Sonship with the Father. Abhishiktānanda equated this experience of Sonship with the Hindu *advaitic* experience. In his view, this experience is the most important goal of human life; it is an experience that is open to anyone who will only realize it.

This thesis will examine Abhishiktānanda's understanding of his *advaitic* experience. How does he describe it? What does he mean when he says that *advaita* is non-monistic? How

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[1] The original name was Abhishikteshvarānanda (The Sanskrit *abhiśikta* means 'anointed', i.e. Christ; *īśvara* means 'Lord'; *ānanda* means 'bliss'). This was shortened to Abhishiktānanda. See James Stuart (ed.): *Swami Abhishiktānanda: His life told through his letters,* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1989, 2nd edition 1995), p. 40. (This book will be referred to in this thesis as *Letters.*) *Sannyāsī*s (Hindu monks) frequently have names ending with '*ānanda'*.

[2] Raimon Panikkar (ed.): *Ascent to the Depth of the Heart: the Spiritual Diary (1948-73) of Swami Abhishiktānanda (Dom Henri Le Saux),* ed. (Paris: OEIL, 1998), p. 19. This book will be referred to in this thesis as *Diary.*

[3] Abhishiktānanda himself explained his name as "Celui-qui-est-dans-la-Béatitude-de-l'Oint-du Seigneur." This seems to emphasize a sharing of Christ's experience. See Alain Chapellier in Marc de Smedt (ed.): *Christ et Vedanta: L'expérience d'Henri Le Saux en Inde* (In the series "Question de", No. 85, Albin Michel, 1991). There may be a development here from a devotional approach to an interiorization of Christ's experience. In any event, both meanings may be correct. Even as he interiorized the experience, Abhishiktānanda continued to be devoted to Christ, whom he called his *Sadguru* (which literally means "True/Real Teacher").

does this compare to other descriptions of nondual experience? Who influenced him to seek the experience, and what expectations did he have of the experience? Was the experience in accordance with those expectations? How does he evaluate his *advaitic* experience?

Abhishiktānanda was born in 1910 at St.-Briac (Brittany), France. His parents encouraged him to enter the priesthood. In 1921, he was sent to the Minor Seminary at Châteaugiron to prepare for the priesthood. In 1924, his mother nearly died giving birth to another child. The following year she was again expecting a child. Abhishiktānanda made a private vow that if she survived he would go as a missionary wherever God would have him go, "even to the most distant mission." An uncle of his had gone as a missionary to China in 1923. His mother did survive.

Abhishiktānanda entered the Major Seminary at Rennes in 1926. A close friend of his at seminary said he wanted to become a Benedictine. When that friend died, Abhishiktānanda felt that he had inherited this vocation to become a monk. Abhishiktānanda sought admission to the Abbey of Ste.-Anne de Kergonan, Brittany. In his letter to the novice master seeking admission to the Abbey, he already states his desire for immediate religious experience:

> What has drawn me from the beginning, and what still leads me on, is the hope of finding there the presence of God more immediately than anywhere else. I have a very ambitious spirit–and this is permissible, is it not? when it is a matter of seeking God–and I hope I shall not be disappointed.[4]

In 1929, Abhishiktānanda entered the Abbey at the age of 19. He remained there until 1948. He became the librarian at Kergonan; while there, he read works by the Greek Fathers of the Church, and the Fathers of the Desert.[5] From them Abhishiktānanda learned the apophatic way of mysticism.

From 1946 to 1948, he was in charge of teaching novices at the Abbey. He taught Canon Law, and the history of the Church, which included the writings of the Church Fathers.

By 1934 he saw his life's vocation as going to India. Kergonan was not satisfying his ambition in seeking God. He longed for an even deeper monasticism. "It was in my deep

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[4] *Letters*, p. 2 (4.12.28).

[5] *Letters*, p. 7.

dissatisfaction that my desire to come to India was born."[6] It is not clear why he chose India; it appears that he believed that life in India would allow him a greater simplicity and a greater degree of renunciation in his monasticism. He began studying Hindu texts in preparation for going to India. Despite his desire to go to India, he was not permitted to make inquiries about going there until after the war ended in 1945.

In 1942, Abhishiktānanda wrote a manuscript for his mother, entitled *Amour et Sagesse* (Love and Wisdom). It was a meditation on the Trinity, which he considered the noblest mystery of the faith, "so little known, so little savoured, experienced, even by fervent Christians." As we shall see, the doctrine of the Trinity continued to be important for Abhishiktānanda in his understanding of the *advaitic* experience. The manuscript *Amour et Sagesse* also takes up the theme of apophatic mysticism which would be so important in Abhishiktānanda's thought. He refers to God as being beyond our thought. It is also interesting that *Amour et Sagesse* makes some references to Indian writings. He quotes Tagore's *Gitanjali* with respect to God's loving condescension in accepting the devotion of his creatures. And he ends each chapter with the sacred syllable 'OM'.

Abhishiktānanda's mother died in 1944. His father died in 1954. After he went to India, Abhishiktānanda stayed in touch with his brothers and sisters. But he never returned to France. One of his sisters, Sr. Marie-Thérèse, also entered the Abbey of St. Michel, a sister-Abbey to Kergonan. Some of Abhishiktānanda's most personal correspondence is with her.

In 1947, Abhishiktānanda wrote to the Bishop of Tiruchirapalli in India about the possibility of going to India. Abhishiktānanda indicated that he sought "to lead the contemplative life, in the absolute simplicity of early Christian monasticism and at the same time in the closest possible conformity with the traditions of Indian *sannyāsa*."[7] Fr. Jules Monchanin, who also shared this vision of an Indian Christianity, answered his letter on behalf of the Bishop. Abhishiktānanda had previously heard of Monchanin from articles he had read. He wrote back to Monchanin:

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[6] *Letters*, p. 12 (13.3.67).

[7] *Letters,* p. *12 (15.5.47).*

> You can imagine what it meant to discover someone whom the thought of the *ātman* leads to the contemplation of the divine Paraclete, and who behind the superficial pantheism discerns the extraordinary intuition of the Spirit reached by the great seers of the Upanishads[8]

Monchanin in turn saw Abhishiktānanda's request to come to India as an answer from God, and he encouraged Abhishiktānanda to join him. Abhishiktānanda left France for India in 1948, with the goal of starting a Christian ashram, and of developing a truly Indian Christianity. In joining Monchanin, Abhishiktānanda had to obtain an indult of exclaustration (formal permission for a monk to live outside his monastery).

Together with Monchanin, who had chosen the name Swami Parama Arūbi Ānanda[9], Abhishiktānanda founded an ashram on the bank of the Kavery River at Tannirpalli. Monchanin had never before led a monastic life; in contrast to him, Abhishiktānanda had had practically no contact with life outside a monastery. The ashram was officially called 'Saccidānanda Āshram'[10] or 'Eremus Sanctissimae Trinitatis' (Hermitage of the Most Holy Trinity). But it was more commonly known by the name they gave to the mango grove there, 'Shāntivanam' (Grove of Peace). The ashram was to be governed by Benedictine rules, but many Hindu customs were followed as well. They dressed and acted as Hindu *sannyāsīs* (Hindu monks who have renounced everything). Abhishiktānanda bought his first *kavi* or saffron robe in February 1949. The emblem of Shantivanam was the cross of St. Benedict with the symbol OM at the centre, and round the edge the words, in Sanskrit, "Peace, Glory to Saccidānanda". The chapel was modeled on the *mulasthanam* (the holy of holies) of the ancient Chola temple of Magadipettu in Pondicherry. They used Hindu prostrations, the *anjali*, light and incense in the Mass that they said in the chapel. Later, Abhishiktānanda adopted the practice of reciting portions of the Gospels and the 'Our Father' in Sanskrit. The two priests wore a rosary around their necks that exactly resembled that worn by Śaivite ascetics. Their quest for a truly Indian Christianity led Abhishiktānanda and Monchanin to embrace poverty and simplicity. Abhishiktānanda slept on the floor and tried not to sit in chairs. He walked in bare feet. He followed a vegetarian diet,

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[8] *Letters*, p. 16 (18.8.47).

[9] "Swami Parama Arūbi Ānanda" means, "He whose joy is the Supreme Formless One, the Holy Spirit." *The Secret of Arunāchala* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1979), p. 1. Unlike Abhishiktānanda, who was known by his Indian name, Monchanin's Indian name did not stick.

[10] *Saccidānanda* from *sat* (being), *cit* (awareness) and *ānanda* (bliss).

which Monchanin considered was essential for a *sannyāsī*. A visiting Hindu monk expressed surprise at their simple way of living, and found their food to be too *sattvic* (pure) even for him.

In 1951, Abhishiktānanda and Monchanin published a book describing their ashram: *An Indian Benedictine Ashram*.[11] The Bishop of Tiruchirapalli, J. Mendonça, wrote the Preface to the book. He supported the ashram in its missionary purposes–to convert Hindus to Christianity, but a Christianity that was one with the Hindu cultural tradition. This was in fact the ideal of the early Jesuit missionary to India, Roberto de Nobili (1577-1656). Mendonça expressed the view that the approach taken by Monchanin and Abhishiktānanda would in the long run help in the assimilation of the ancient Indian culture and its Christianisation. Their goal was to allow the Indian Church to be as Indian as it could legitimately be, just as in previous eras the Church was able to be Greek and Roman. More than ten years later, this approach was affirmed by Vatican II (1962-65).

This use of Hindu cultural forms to express Christianity is sometimes referred to as 'inculturation.' This approach has angered some Hindus, who find it a deceptive misuse of their own traditions.[12] In their view, to say that Hinduism receives its fulfillment in Christ devalues their own tradition. What these critics have not acknowledged is that although Abhishiktānanda may have come to India with the intent to convert, in the end he was himself profoundly influenced by Indian traditions. Panikkar says that he was converted by those whom he had sought to convert.[13] Abhishiktānanda himself moved away from a theology of fulfillment to an appreciation of Hinduism in its own right.

Abhishiktānanda became convinced that the Hindu *advaitic* experience of the Self was central to any dialogue with Hinduism. He sought to attain the *advaitic* experience by meeting

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[11] *An Indian Benedictine Ashram* (Tiruchirapalli, 1951). This was later translated and revised as *Ermites du Saccidānanda* (Paris: Casterman, 1957).

[12] See the attack on inculturation by Sita Ram Goel: *Catholic Ashrams: Sannyasins or Swindlers?* (New Delhi: Voice of India, 1988, revised 1994). What is especially interesting is that Goel was at one time the treasurer of the Abhishiktānanda Society in New Delhi. He includes an extensive correspondence between Fr. Bede Griffiths and Devananda with respect to Shantivanam Ashram. Goel refers disparagingly to the "Trinity from Tannirpalli" (Monchanin, Abhishiktānanda and Griffiths). It is also interesting that Goel met Abhishiktānanda in 1958, and had no idea that he was a missionary. What impressed him at that time was that Abhishiktānanda knew Hindu philosophy better than he did. Goel's book appears to be representative of what Hacker calls "surviving traditional Hinduism" which he contrasts with "neo-Hinduism".

[13] *Diary*, Introduction by R. Panikkar, p. xvi.

with the Hindu sages Ramaṇa Maharshi and Gnānānanda, by spending prolonged periods of meditation in the caves of Arunāchala (a mountain that South Indian Śaivites consider sacred), as well as by prolonged retreats at his hermitage at Uttarkashi in the Himalayas which he established in 1961. Before he moved into this hermitage, he hallowed it with a sacred Vedic fire.[14]

Abhishiktānanda found it difficult to reconcile his *advaitic* experience with his experience as a Christian, although he continued to attempt to do so. He believed that until the Church could welcome those with the *advaitic* experience, there would be no possibility of the Church's progress in India.[15] As he continued his experimental investigation of *advaita*, he came to prefer Hindu terminology to express his religious experience, and his beliefs as a Christian changed.[16] During this time, he was tormented by doubt. At times he was afraid that he was exchanging his Christian beliefs, and risking his eternal salvation for an illusory experience, a "mirage".[17] But in his final years, Abhishiktānanda became convinced of the authenticity and truth of his *advaitic* experience.

The ashram Shantivanam was a disappointment to Abhishiktānanda in that he and Monchanin had difficulty attracting Hindus to join the ashram. Abhishiktānanda gradually gave up his dream of a community of Hindu-Christian monks; instead he devoted himself to personally being a *sannyāsī* who was at the same time both Christian and Hindu. In 1971, looking back on the ashram, Abhishiktānanda wrote:

> Expansion in human terms, success, numbers are of no importance. All that belongs to the realm of *māyā*, appearance, and the monk is only concerned with *nitya*, the real.[18]

In 1957, Monchanin died. Abhishiktānanda became more and more a *sannyāsī,* spending long periods of time alone in his hermitage at Uttarkashi in the Himalayas. In 1968, Fr. Bede

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[14] *Letters*, p. 145 (24.5.62).

[15] *Diary*, p. 259 (26.8.63): "The Church will only have the right to call Hindus to herself when she is capable of receiving people like Ramana."

[16] See my article, "Abhishiktānanda: Hindu Advaitic Experience and Christian Beliefs", *Hindu-Christian Studies Bulletin*, 1998, Vol. 11, 31-38.

[17] *Diary*, p. 180, (27.11.56).

[18] *Letters*, p. 108.

Griffiths took over the ashram Shantivanam; Abhishiktānanda never returned to it. Bede Griffiths continued the practice of using Hindu cultural forms in the Christian worship at the ashram.

Abhishiktānanda remained a Roman Catholic priest until his death in 1973. But he also participated in Hindu (*Śaivite*) worship. His goal of being a *sannyāsī* who was both Christian and Hindu was fulfilled when he became *guru* to his own disciple, Marc Chaduc, and when this disciple was given a joint Hindu-Christian initiation *(dīkshā)* by both Abhishiktānanda and by Chidānanda, a Hindu monk at the Sivānanda ashram in Rishikesh. It was during his time with his disciple that Abhishiktānanda achieved what he believed was the definitive *advaitic* experience. The intensity of this experience removed all doubts for him. But it also resulted in a heart attack in 1973. During this attack, which Abhishiktānanda refers to as an "adventure", he had further experiences that for him confirmed the validity of the experience.

B. The issue: The nature of Abhishiktānanda's advaitic experience

Abhishiktānanda understood his experience to be *advaitic* but not monistic. '*Advaita*' means "non-dual", or "not-two". For example, one aspect of his *advaitic* experience is that the human Self and God (*Brahman*) are experienced as "not two" (*advaita*). But although the *advaitic* experience is that of "not two" (or non-dual) he also says that the *advaitic* experience is different from "only one" (or absolute monism). Abhishiktānanda's emphasis on the experience being neither "not two" nor "only one" gives value to both unity and diversity. To the extent that the experience is one of unity it is "not two". And to the extent that individuality is not swallowed up or identified with the One, the experience is not "only one". He speaks of *advaita-aneka* [not two, not one]:

> …God himself is both one and plural in his mystery–or rather, to put it more accurately, he is not-one, *an-eka*, and also not-two, *a-dvaita*.[19]

> The truth of the simultaneous *advaita-aneka* [not-two, not-one], discovered in the *nun* [now] of the Present.[20]

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[19] *Saccidānanda* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1984), p. 135.

[20] *Diary*, p. 370 (2.2.73).

> Advaita n'est pas monisme.[21] [Advaita is not monism.]
>
> The individual is the mystery of God realized in a not-one [*aneka*] way in its […] indivisibility as undivided non-duality [*akhanda-advaita*].[22]

The distinction between *advaita* and monism was crucial for Abhishiktānanda. It was important in his attempted reconciliation of Hindu and Christian thought. An examination of this distinction may therefore prove fruitful in the continuing dialogue between Hindus and Christians. Abhishiktānanda's use of the term *aneka* (not-one) will become of central importance in Chapter X, where I discuss how Abhishiktānanda uses this term, and compare it with traditional Hinduism and with neo-Hinduism.

Advaita has been frequently interpreted in a monistic fashion. This is especially the case in Western interpretations of *advaita,* which often apply Western ideas of monism to describe it. For example, Ninian Smart describes Vedantic *advaita* as monistic:

> Though the non-dualism of Shankara is well known, it is useful to recapitulate briefly its main features. For Shankara the 'That art thou' is to be taken in the starkest, clearest sense. It means that the eternal self within the individual is identical with Brahman, the Absolute or Ultimate Reality. (…) This rigorous insistence on the non-dualism between the soul and the divine Reality is paralleled by an equally uncompromising monism in relation to the world.[23]

Abhishiktānanda was well aware of the problems of Western misinterpretations of *advaita*:

> The absolute advaita of Shankara is only one of the Indian *darśanas* (and moreover does it not falsify Shankara and do we not make him much more angular than he was in reality, when we interpret him with western logic. Cp. Otto, Eckhart-Shankara…the commentary on the *Gita* by Shankara.)[24]

His reference is to Otto's well-known book *Mysticism East and West* where Otto makes comparisons between Shankara and Eckhart, and where Otto includes several references to

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[21] *Intériorité et révélation: Essais theologique* (Sisteron: Editions Présence, 1982), p. 18. This book will be referred to in this thesis as *Intériorité.*

[22] *Diary*, p. 214 (17.5.58).

[23] Ninian Smart: The *Yogi and the Devotee: the Interplay between the Upanishads and Catholic Theology* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1968), pp. 36-37.

[24] *Diary*, p. 29 (31.3.52).

Shankara's commentary on the *Gītā*. Abhishiktānanda seems to approve of Otto's comparisons. Otto says that the usual translation of *advaita* is monism, but that non-dualism is more exact.[25]

In emphasizing the non-monistic characteristics of his experience, Abhishiktānanda was able to leave some of these Western preconceptions behind. But monistic interpretations of *advaita* are also very common in Hindu philosophers. For example, Radhakrishnan refers to *advaita* as "monistic idealism"*:*

> If we put the subjective interest of the Indian mind along with its tendency to arrive at a synthetic vision, we shall see how monistic idealism becomes the truth of things. To it the whole growth of Vedic thought points; on it are based the Buddhistic and Brahmanical religions; it is the highest truth revealed to India. Even systems which announce themselves as dualistic or pluralistic seem to be permeated by a strong monistic character. For our purposes monistic idealism is of four types: (1) Non-dualism or Advaitism; (2) Pure Monism; (3) Modified Monism; and (4) Implicit Monism.[26]

Radhakrishnan says that his first category, 'Advaitic monism' relies on abstract and philosophical reflection, particularly the psychological interpretation of the three states of waking, dreaming and dreamless sleep. Through all these states, there remains the self that is permanent and "ever-identical". Only the self is real. The categories of the world of experience, time, space and cause are self-contradictory and have no real existence. Their inexplicable existence is explained by the word *māyā*. The self is "the true and the eternal, and there is nought beside it." His second category, 'Pure Monism' recognizes a higher power than the abstract intellect relied on in the first category:

> We have to sink ourselves in the universal consciousness and make ourselves co-extensive with all that is. We do not then so much *think* reality as *live* it, do not so much *know* it as *become* it. Such an extreme monism, with its distinctions of logic and intuition, reality and the world of existence, we meet with in some Upaniṣads, Nāgārjuna and Śaṁkara in his ultra-philosophical moods, Śrī Harṣa and the Advaita Vedāntins, and echoes of it are heard in Parmenides and Plato, Spinoza and Plotinus, Bradley and Bergson, not to speak of the mystics, in the West.[27]

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[25] Rudolf Otto: *Mysticism East and West* (Macmillan, 1970, first published 1932), p. 19. He writes to Fr. Lemarié about reading this book. *Lettres d'un sannyāsī chrétien à Joseph Lemarié*, p. 36 (10.2.52).

[26] Robert A. McDermott (ed.): Radhakrishnan: *Selected Writings on Philosophy, Religion, and Culture*, "Introduction to *Indian Philosophy I*", New York: Dutton, 1970), pp. 75,76.

[27] *Ibid*. p. 81.

Radhakrishnan considers both Non-dualism and Pure Monism to be monistic. His two other categories also are monistic, at least by implication. Modified Monism (e.g. Rāmānuja) recognizes degrees of reality, but these are measured in relation to their distance from the one integral reality. And he says that even the dualism of Madhva is fundamentally a monism so long as the reals are dependent on God who alone is independent.

Other Hindu philosophers are equally adamant that *advaita*, even in Shankara, is not monism. For example, T.M.P. Mahadevan says,

> The term *advaita* is negative. It does not imply a monistic ideal, but implies a negation of dualism. And this negation applies both to two-ness as well as to the attempt to grasp the world as a whole by means of any logical system with rational distinctions. Because *Brahman* is beyond duality, it cannot be known conceptually, nor can it be substantially or qualitatively determined, for this would imply a division of the One.[28]

And in his book on Ramaṇa Maharshi, Mahadevan makes the same point:

> *Brahman* is without characteristics. Even to say that it is one is not strictly true, for the category of number is not applicable to it. That is why the negative expression 'non-dual', or 'not-two' (*advaita*), is preferred.[29]

There are therefore differing views, even by Hindu philosophers, as to whether or not the Hindu *advaitic* experience is monistic. If it is not monistic, then it may not be correct to speak of the individual's *identity* with *Brahman*. The ideas of *māyā* and of the unreality of the world may also be reinterpreted

These are some of the issues that I will explore in attempting to understand Abhishiktānanda's non-monistic view of *advaita*. My emphasis will be on exploring Abhishiktānanda's own understanding of this experience. But I will also examine how his understanding fits with classical Hinduism and with neo-Hinduism. Abhishiktānanda's understanding of *advaita* may also have derived from non-Hindu traditions or sources. As will become clear in this thesis, he was influenced by Buddhist thought. Abhishiktānanda's understanding of *advaita* is in some ways similar to and in some ways different from that of Buddhist non-dualism. There are also Western and specifically Christian influences in

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[28] T.M.P. Mahadevan: *Invitation to Indian Philosophy* (New Delhi, 1974), 367f, cited by Michael von Brück: The *Unity of Reality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), p. 17.

Abhishiktānanda's understanding of *advaita*. For Abhishiktānanda, these various influences did not result from a mere religious eclecticism, but rather from a search for the religious ground that he believed to be expressed in all these different religious traditions.

I will use comparative philosophy to examine Abhishiktānanda's understanding of his *advaitic* experience. Chapter II of this thesis sets out some of the ways that comparative philosophy will be used to do this. In Chapter III I examine the ideas of some of the persons who influenced Abhishiktānanda in seeking and in obtaining his *advaitic* experience. Their views are important in his self-understanding of the experience. In Chapter IV, I examine Abhishiktānanda's own reports of his experience. Later chapters then analyze his own understanding of the experience. I do this by asking which dualities Abhishiktānanda denies in his claim that *advaita* is nondual. The specific dualities that are denied can be more readily seen when we look at how Abhishiktānanda understands the following ideas: (1) perception, (2) thought, (3) action, (4) ideas about the nature of reality, and (5) ideas about the nature of our relationship with God. Each of these ideas will be explored in a separate chapter of this thesis.

Chapter V explores the implications of non-monistic *advaita* for perception. Perception is normally understood in terms of a perceiving subject and a perceived object. How does Abhishiktānanda see the subject/object relation? What unity is there between the subjective self and the object perceived? Does any difference remain? How does he understand the self?

Chapter VI explores the implications of non-monistic *advaita* for Abhishiktānanda's views of conceptual thought. Our conceptual thought depends on categories and distinctions. Abhishiktānanda does not believe that concepts can adequately describe the *advaitic* experience. How does he understand the relation between our concepts and our experience? A comparison with some ideas in philosophy is also made.

Non-monistic *advaita* also has implications for our actions and ethics. This is explored in Chapter VII. Monism tends to devalue the world, and leads to an 'acosmism' in actions. But if the world of diversity has reality, then there is a basis for a more dynamic interaction with reality. How did Abhishiktānanda's understanding of *advaita* influence his views of action in

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[29] T.M.P. Mahadevan: *Ramana Maharshi: The Sage of Aruṇācala* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1977), p. 12.

the world? How did it relate to his monasticism and his view of the role of the *sannyāsī*?

Chapter VIII explores the implications of non-monistic *advaita* for Abhishiktānanda's understanding of reality. What is Abhishiktānanda's understanding of the relation between the Absolute and the phenomenal world? A monistic understanding of reality, that holds there is nothing but *Brahman* will see the world of diversity as *māyā*, not real, illusion. A non-monistic understanding of *advaita* may revise this view of *māyā*, granting reality to diversity as well as to unity. One way that Abhishiktānanda obtains this more positive view of *māyā* is when it is looked at in terms of the *śakti*, or energy of God. This may or may not amount to a revision of classical Hindu ideas of *māyā* and *śakti*.

Chapter IX explores the implications of non-monistic *advaita* for Abhishiktānanda's understanding of the relation between God and ourselves. How does the experience relate to Abhishiktānanda's theological beliefs? Abhishiktānanda uses non-monistic *advaita* to reinterpret classical Christian ideas such as that of Creation and of the Trinity.

Chapter X, the conclusion, will provide a summary of Abhishiktānanda's understanding of non-monistic *advaita*, and a further exploration of some of the issues raised.

The Appendix discusses the influence of C.G. Jung on Abhishiktānanda's understanding of his *advaitic* experience. A Jungian interpretation gives one possible way of providing a coherent picture of what Abhishiktānanda means by non-monistic *advaita*. The Appendix also shows how Abhishiktānanda's ideas may resolve some issues that were raised by Jung himself in relation to Hindu thought. Much more work would be needed to fill in the details. This synthesis is one that I personally find persuasive, although I believe there are other ways of attempting to find a coherence in Abhishiktānanda's ideas as they changed over time.

C. Previous Research

The Bibliography lists both primary and secondary sources for Abhishiktānanda. For Abhishiktānanda's own writings, I have relied primarily on the extensive Bibliography prepared by James Stuart, who edited the *Letters.* The Bibliography also lists many secondary sources, including several doctoral theses dealing with Abhishiktānanda.

A doctoral thesis by Emmanuel Vattakuzhy, later published as *Indian Christian Sannyasa and Swami Abhishiktānanda*[30] deals with the issue of renunciation and Abhishiktānanda's choice to become a *sannyāsī*. It compares this choice with that of Christian monasticism. The book points out that for Abhishiktānanda, contemplation was more important than other 'activities' of religious life. While of some relevance to this thesis, the book does not look at the *advaitic* experience in contexts other than that of monastic renunciation.

A doctoral thesis by Antony Kalliath, later published as *the Word in the Cave*[31] deals with Abhishiktānanda's *advaitic* experience primarily from a theological perspective, and in the context of Hindu-Christian dialogue. Kalliath's book analyzes Abhishiktānanda's understanding of Christianity in terms of *advaita*. As such, it is more concerned with doctrinal issues than with an analysis of the experience. With respect to the issue of monism, Kalliath says,

> *Advaita* is often misinterpreted or mistaken as monism because every one tries to understand it exclusively through the *advaita-vāda* of Śaṇkara, which is prominently monistic in nature. Abhishiktānanda understands *advaita* directly from the Upaniṣads along with his Christian background without leaning on any Vedāntic school.[32]

Kalliath points out that by his non-monistic *advaita* Abhishiktānanda was able to include a dynamic conception of God. Kalliath does not examine this non-monistic *advaita* except in terms of the Western mysticism of Eckhart and Plotinus. Kalliath distinguishes this mysticism from Shankara's *advaita,* which he regards as monistic.[33]

A doctoral thesis by Roger Earl Spence[34] draws interesting parallels between Abhishiktānanda's experience and the transpersonal psychology of Ken Wilber. The comparison

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[30] Emmanuel Vattakuzhy: *Indian Christian Sannyasa and Swami Abhishiktānanda* (Bangalore, 1981). (Originally submitted as doctoral thesis at Gregorian University, Rome).

[31] Antony Kalliath, C.M.I.: *The Word in the Cave: the Experiential Journey of Swami Abhishiktānanda to the Point of Hindu-Christian Meeting* (New Delhi: Intercultural Publications, 1996). Original thesis: "Self-Awakening: An Analytico-Critical Study of the Religious Experience of Swami Abhishiktānanda (Dom Henri le Saux, O.S.B.) in the Context of Hindu-Christian Meeting" (Th.D. thesis, Gregorian University, Rome, 1991).

[32] *Ibid*. p. 369.

[33] Kalliath relies here on Rudolf Otto's analysis in *Mysticism East and West,* (New York: Macmillan, 1970; first published 1932).

[34] Roger Earl Spence: "Interiority in the Works of Abhishiktānanda and Ken Wilber" (Ph.D. thesis, Graduate Theological Union, 1987).

is an appropriate one, and will be explored further in this thesis. A recent book by Wilber, *One Taste,* confirms the appropriateness of the comparison with Abhishiktānanda. Wilber there refers to nonduality as “not-two, not-one”; he wants to ensure that *advaita* is not turned into a conceptual monism.[35] Spence refers primarily to works of Abhishiktānanda that had been translated into English. Since the date of Spence’s thesis (1987), many more works of both Abhishiktānanda and of Wilber have appeared.

An MA thesis by the Rev. Robert Stephens[36] relates Abhishiktānanda’s experience to the context of religious dialogue. Stephens has drawn attention to the fact that Abhishiktānanda avoids a monistic interpretation of his *advaitic* experience; he suggests the expression ‘non-monistic non-dualism’ to refer to Abhishiktānanda’s views. Stephens is more concerned with the theological implications of this experience than to attempt to look at it in detail. He gives prominence to religious and theological language instead of looking at the experience. In this he seems to be taking exactly the opposite approach to that taken by Abhishiktānanda. He says that Abhishiktānanda, like other mystics, makes statements using psychological language that are “theologically rash.” Without much analysis, Stephens denies that Abhishiktānanda’s religious experience was the same as an altered state of consciousnes. There is no positive appreciation of any comparison to the psychology of the unconscious. On the contrary, Stephens quotes with approval an article by R.S. Rajan which laments the loss of a “critical” spirit in philosophy, and in recent developments in depth psychology which question the scope of the conscious mind, and which “erode” the sovereignty of reason. This is in direct contrast to Abhishiktānanda, whose own view is that concepts and theology are in the realm of *nāmarūpa,* names and forms, and that it is the experience itself which is primary.

D. Notes on the Text

In quoting Abhishiktānanda, an ellipsis in parentheses (…) indicates an omission from the text by the editors, who often selected only portions of writings by Abhishiktānanda for publication. An ellipsis in brackets […] indicates an ommision by myself, or in a few cases, a passage that the editors regarded as unintelligible. I have used English translations where they are available. Otherwise I have given both the original French and my own translation, which is

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[35] Ken Wilber, *One Taste* (Boston: Shambhala, 1999), p. 135.

[36] Robert A. Stephens, “Religious Experience as a Meeting-Point in Dialogue: an Evaluation of the venture of Swami Abhishiktānanda” (MA thesis, Sydney University, 1984).

also given in brackets. Abbreviations are used for references to these works by Abhishiktānanda that have been cited most frequently:

Further Shore: *The Further Shore: "Sannyasa", "The Upanishads–An Introduction"* and "The Upanishads and the Advaitic Experience" (Delhi: ISPCK, 1975, revised 1984).

Guru: *Guru and Disciple* (ISPCK, 1990). A previous edition of this book also contains "The Mountain of the Lord." *Guru and Disciple: Gñānānanda, A Sage of the East and the Mountain of the Lord* (London: SPCK, 1974).

Initiation: *Initiation à la spiritualité des Upanishads* (Sisteron: Editions Présence, 1979).

Intériorité: *Intériorité et révélation: Essais theologique* (Sisteron: Editions Présence, 1982).

Diary: *Ascent to the Depth of the Heart: the Spiritual Diary (1948-73) of Swami Abhishiktānanda (Dom Henri Le Saux),* ed. Raimon Panikkar (Paris: OEIL, 1998), a translation of *La montée au fond du cœur* (referred to as "La montée).

Letters: *Swami Abhishiktānanda: His life told through his letters,* ed. James Stuart (Delhi: ISPCK, 1989, 2nd revised edition 1995).

Meeting Point: *Hindu-Christian Meeting Point* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1969, 2nd edition 1976), a translation of *Rencontre de l'hindouisme et du christianisme*(1965).

Saccidānanda *Saccidānanda: a Christian approach to Advaitic Experience* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1974, second revised edition 1984), a translation of *Sagesse hindoue mystique chrétienne.*

Secret: *The Secret of Arunāchala* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1979), a translation of *Souvenirs d'Arunāchala.*

Sanskrit words are given in roman transliteration, with diacriticals. Some words or names, like 'Shankara,' are written without diacriticals because they are so well known in that form. Abhishiktānanda's published works are not consistent in using diacriticals. Different translators use different conventions or simplified transcriptions. Sometimes the same word is spelled with and without diacriticals even within the same work.

II. Comparative Philosophy and Dialogue

A. Comparative Philosophy

Abhishiktānanda's life was a dialogue between his Western traditions and the Eastern Hindu traditions that he sought to understand and to experience. He tried to describe his experience using Western language, as well as by using Hindu ideas that he interpreted. His description therefore raises the issue of the adequacy of these ideas in describing his experience. We must look at how he approached and interpreted his experience. Furthermore, we must be aware of the further level of our own interpretation in reading Abhishiktānanda's description. We bring previous understandings and assumptions with us even as we read Abhishiktānanda. There is no 'neutral' or 'objective' description of an experience.

This thesis uses comparative philosophy to explore Abhishiktānanda's understanding of his *advaitic* experience. One attempt to compare the philosophical implications of nondualistic experience is David Loy's book, *Nonduality: A Study in Comparative Philosophy*.[1] Loy distinguishes five related but different senses of nonduality: (1) the negation of dualistic thinking (2) the nonplurality of the world (3) the nondifference of subject and object (4) the nonduality of the Absolute and phenomena and (5) the mystical unity between God and ourselves. These categories are not exhaustive. And these categories must themselves be examined as to their underlying assumptions.[2]

The use of Loy's categories is not intended to force Abhishiktānanda's experience into a predefined way of understanding the experience. Rather, it is a way of engaging in dialogue with Abhishiktānanda, a testing of what dualities he experienced as having been overcome in his *advaitic* experience. Abhishiktānanda's understanding may not fit with Loy's way of

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[1] David Loy: *Nonduality: A Study in Comparative Philosophy* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1988). This book will be referred to as *Nonduality.*

[2] One consideration is that Loy writes from his perspective as a Buddhist, but also as a Westerner familiar with Western philosophy.

understanding nondualities, but making these comparisons can help to clarify his understanding of his experience.

Another work on comparative philosophy that I frequently refer to in this thesis is J.S. Krüger's *Along Edges.*[3] Like Loy, Krüger uses Buddhist assumptions for the basis of his comparisons.

I also rely on J.L. Mehta's approach to comparative philosophy.[4] Mehta uncovers and analyzes many of the assumptions that Westerners bring to their study of Indian philosophy. He says that Westerners approach and interpret Eastern thought and experience in terms of Western categories.[5] Mehta asks whether it is possible to strip away this conceptual overlay in order to have a true dialogue with these other traditions. He points out that sometimes the questions that we ask are themselves questionable, and bring with them certain unacknowledged assumptions. For example, the question, "Is Vedānta a mystical philosophy?" cannot be answered with a simple yes or no.[6] Apart from the assumption of what constitutes mysticism, the question brings with it our assumption of the nature of 'philosophy'. Is Vedānta a philosophy?

The question of what constitutes philosophy is itself a philosophical question.[7] Many Western philosophers have denied that Indian thought is a philosophy.[8] In their view, Indian

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[3] J.S. Krüger: *Along Edges* (University of South Africa, 1995). This book will be referred to as *Along Edges.*

[4] Mehta is known in the West primarily as an interpreter of Heidegger. But Mehta is also a Hindu Brahmin, who seeks to compare his Hindu traditions to the ideas of western philosophy and self-questioning. He quotes with approval the Indologist Paul Deussen's statement to "build his life's house" where the lines of Indology and philosophy meet:

> "…die Hütte meines Lebens da zu bauen, wo sich die Linien der Philosophie und Indologie schneiden" (Paul Deussen: *Mein Leben* (Leipzig, 1922), p. 165, quoted by Mehta: *Philosophy and Religion: Essays in Interpretation*, (Delhi, 1990) p. 53, referred to by Halbfass in Foreword to *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition* (New York: Brill, 1992), p. ix.

[5] The interpretation of Hindu traditions in terms of Western ideas was something that began with the colonial modernization of India. In Heidegger's terms, this use of Western concepts is the 'Europeanization of the earth." Mehta accepted the challenge of belonging to this "one world". He said, "…there is no other way open to us in the East, but to go along with this Europeanization and to go *through* it." Mehta: *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, ed. William J. Jackson, (New York: Brill, 1992), pp. 91,92. Some traditional Hindus do not appreciate this goal of Mehta. His statement should, however, be seen not as an endorsement of Western values, but a going beyond them.

[6] J.L. Mehta: "Heidegger and Vedanta", *India and the West: The Problem of Understanding*, (Harvard, 1985), p. 244.

[7] This point is made by Raimon Panikkar in his introduction to *J.L. Mehta on Heidegge Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, pp. xvi, xvii.

thought is theological, emphasizing the value of the transformation of the individual through a religious experience. Indian thought does not separate philosophy from religion and does not have the Western idea of the autonomy of human reasoning. Indian thought is still caught in mythological language, whereas Western philosophy believes that it has overcome *mythos* through *logos.* And in contrast to the Western approach to the history of ideas, Indian history of thought is more doxographical, refraining from investigations into the sources of ideas and uncritically assuming a continuity of thought within various schools or *darśanas*.[9]

Should the word 'philosophy' be reserved to describe Western thought? Panikkar says "…there would be no tragedy if India did not have 'philosophy' in the Greek and even western sense of the word." But the danger in relegating the word 'philosophy' to Western thought is that we might then conclude that there is no other kind of thought. Western thought could then not be compared with any other; this would obscure the assumptions in Western thought.

Western philosophy assumes that it is neutral–both religiously neutral and somehow value-free. Even within the discipline of Religious Studies it has often been argued that the study of religion should be based on scientific methods that are not religious.[10] Against these ideas of objectivity and neutrality, Mehta says,

> The concept of a rational secular sphere that is neutral, value-free and a source of self-evident verities has worked havoc in the encounter of non-Western cultures with the West, largely to the former's detriment.[11]

According to Mehta, all philosophical understanding must culminate in self-understanding and is therefore religious. The "effort at self-understanding … constitutes the

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[8] See Wilhelm Halbfass: "On the Exclusion of India from the History of Philosophy", *India and Europe* (Albany: State University of New York, 1988), pp. 145ff. For example, Hegel says that "real philosophy" begins only in Greece. Many historians of philosophy omit Indian thought entirely from their surveys of thought. The Indologist P. Deussen was an exception in that he did not segregate religion from philosophy.

[9] The use of the word *darśana* to describe Indian 'philosophy' is discussed by Wilhelm Halbfass: "*Darśana, Ānvṇīkṣikī*, Philosophy," *India and Europe* (Albany: State University of New York, 1988), pp. 263ff.

[10] But see D.R. Griffin's criticism of this view of Religious Studies in "Religious experience, naturalism, and the social scientific study of religion", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Volume 68, Issue 1: March 2000, pp. 99-126. See also J.S. Krüger: *Along Edges*, p. 81: "The alleged value-freeness of science is itself a valuational postulate."

[11] J.L. Mehta: "Science, Conversation and Wholeness", *Philosophy and Religion: Essays in Interpretation* (Delhi, 1990), p. 191.

basic religious process."[12] A modern person, without the certainties of religious faith, will try to attain a certainty about his or her own nature and about the world. Even existentialism represents "only the final stage in the attempt to reappropriate philosophically, i.e., in secularized form and without needing the warrant and the guarantee of religious faith, insights into human nature which religious faith had sustained so far."[13] But Mehta says that Heidegger appropriates the religious into his thought.[14] His idea of "pure thinking" quite obviously takes on the character of devotion, thanking, and a response to a call beyond ourselves.

Mehta believes that Heidegger was the first Western philosopher who explored the roots of the assumptions that had been taken for granted in the West. He says that Heidegger put into question the metaphysical concepts of Being, Time, Reason and World; in this way he awakened Western consciousness from its "sublime metaphysical illusion" which had existed since Socrates.[15] Although Mehta does not always agree with Heidegger, he uses Heidegger's writings as a kind of bridge, or Archimedean point for comparing Western with Eastern traditions. In this way, these Eastern traditions can now also see these assumptions of the West, and as a result they can go back and retrieve the forgotten foundations of their own spiritual traditions.[16]

Our theories depend on fundamental assumptions that are metaphysical, epistemological, psychological and ethical. Even though he criticizes metaphysical thinking, Heidegger says "the metaphysical mode of representation…is in some respect inevitable."[17] We make assumptions

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[12] J.L. Mehta: "Problems of Understanding", *Bulletin, Center for the Study of World Religions*, Harvard, Vol. 15, nr. 1, 1988/89, 2ff, cited by Jackson in his Prelude to *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 18.

[13] J.L. Mehta: "The Philosophical Necessity of Existentialism," *India and the West: The Problem of Understanding*, p. 38.

[14] J.L. Mehta: "Finding Heidegger", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, pp. 30, 31.

[15] J.L. Mehta: "The Will to Interpret and India's Dreaming Spirit", *India and the West: The Problem of Understanding*, p. 195. Mehta characterizes metaphysical thinking and scientific thinking as thinking that is dominated by the concept of system and of representational system-building. "Heidegger's Debts to Dilthey's Hermeneutics and Husserl's Phenomenology", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 47.

[16] J.L. Mehta: "Finding Heidegger", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 29. This disclosure of Western assumptions also undermined the acceptance of the authority of Western civilization.

[17] Martin Heidegger: *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, p. 116. Cited by Mehta: "The Saving Leap", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 93. Cf. Krüger: "…religious metaphysics (a conceptual, systematic account of the most general features of the phenomenal, cognised world) cannot be 'objectively' 'true', but it remains inevitable, and could be useful as a world-orientation." *Along Edges*, p. 128.

concerning the nature of the self that is doing the theorizing, and upon the nature of the 'object' of our theorizing. There are epistemological assumptions–how we relate our experience to our conceptualization of that experience and whether we believe that our experience can be reduced to those concepts. We must make the assumption of whether to take a literal or a symbolic view of language. There are also ontological assumptions; our view of being is included in every method. Heidegger says, "In every understanding of the world, existence is understood with it, and *vice versa*."[18] Those who assume they have no ontology merely have an unconscious or unexamined ontology.

For Mehta, comparative analysis is first of all the making of distinctions, rather than starting out with an assertion of blanket identities between Eastern and Western philosophemes (similar sounding ideas).[19] He says that extreme caution is needed in every kind of 'comparative' philosophizing and in the employment of Western metaphysical terms to express ideas rooted in another linguistic soil.[20] Eastern ideas must be seen in their historical context. We must acknowledge them as "other". We cannot assume that the terminology that we use is adequate, or that it does not carry with it certain assumptions:

> It is a delusion, which we are only now beginning to see through, to believe that there are certain perennial problems to which different philosophers, arising at different times, and different places, have given varying answers, that all that we have to do, as thinkers, is to decide which one of them we would like to favor.[21]

If we just translate Eastern thinking into the language of Western metaphysics, taken as the universally valid paradigm, we will just perpetuate Western 'philosophy'. Because of these unacknowledged assumptions in our own thinking and in our own questions, we must be careful of making easy syntheses with Eastern thought:

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[18] Martin Heidegger: *Being and Tim*e, tr. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), p. 194.

[19] J.L. Mehta: "Science, Conversation and Wholeness", *Philosophy and Religio: Essays in Inter-pretation*, pp. 191-2. This involves taking the "other" as *other*. But Mehta differs from postmodernism in his goal of later attaining a unity. He says, "distinctions presuppose a prior unity and they demand a subsequent restoration of lost unity." "Postmodern Problems East/West", *J.L Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 241.

[20] J.L. Mehta: "The Saving Leap", *J.L Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, 96, ft. 10.

[21] J.L. Mehta: "The Transformation of Phenomenology", *J.L Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 74. This rejection of perennial problems is not necessarily a rejection of a perennial philosophy in the sense of a common experience that is expressed in different ways.

> If there is any hope of an ultimate unity of divergent philosophies and religions, it lies not in the throwing of dubious bridges across them, not in questionable syntheses and compromises, but solely, through a going back of each to its own origins, in the leap into this swaying region, vibrant with the possibility of giving voice to its primordial word in a multiplicity of tongues.[22]

Therefore, the use of Loy's categories in this thesis is something that must be done with caution, and without yielding to the temptation of making easy syntheses. We must also be alert to any synthesis attempted by Abhishiktānanda in his descriptions of his experience. The 'method' of examining his described experience is itself a way of dialogue with Abhishiktānanda, and a dialogue with the Indian sources that he interprets. It is a way and not a method. Mehta says that comparative philosophy is like Heidegger's own work which

> …is not a system and, by reason of the very task it has set before itself cannot be one. It is rather a trail blazed, a path traversed, a way taken by thought, as he calls it, toward the one goal of enshrining in language, or rather preparing to do so, the unuttered thought of Being.[23]

He says that Westerners are too concerned with methodology, and do not realize that this concern is itself an assumption that must be questioned. In our study of religion, concentrating on social science and anthropology, we have too little regard for truly religious thinking.[24] Method is part of the very subjectivism that Heidegger seeks to overcome.[25] Our way of using concepts is itself open to question. Mehta says that the Western metaphysical tradition of thinking, conceptualizing, objectifying and being concerned with the truth of being is "at the root of the present world-night as also of the progress behind which it hides itself."[26]

In reading Abhishiktānanda's descriptions of his experience, we must acknowledge our own assumptions. One of the assumptions made by this thesis is to be open to

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[22] J.L. Mehta: "The Saving Leap", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, 90. Following Heidegger, Mehta says that the ultimate unity is the sphere of the *Ereignis*. It is inaccessible to representational thinking.

[23] J.L. Mehta: "Heidegger's Debts to Dilthey's Hermeneutics and Husserl's Phenomenology", *J.L Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 35. The Way is to follow the movement of the showing by Being. Mehta says (p. 50) that in speaking of this Way, Heidegger has in mind something like the *Tao*.

[24] J.L. Mehta: "Beyond Believing and Knowing", *India and the West: The Problem of Understanding,* p. 214.

[25] J.L. Mehta: " Heidegger's Debt to Dilthey's Hermeneutics and Husserl's Phenomenology", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 48.

[26] J.L. Mehta: "The Concept of Progress", *India and the West: The Problem of Understanding*, p. 82.

Abhishiktānanda's self-understanding of his *advaitic* experience. This means that my approach to his experience does not exclude in an *a priori* fashion the authenticity of the experience. For example, a Freudian interpretation of his experience would emphasize Abhishiktānanda's closeness to his mother, and would see his efforts at obtaining the experience as nothing but a desire to return to the womb, the 'oceanic experience.[27] I do not use such reductivist approaches in this thesis, except where Abhishiktānanda himself refers to them, such as his views of our desire to 'project' a God outside ourselves.

B. Experience and Concept: Four Models

One of the assumptions that Abhishiktānanda makes (and which we in turn make as we read his descriptions of his experience) relates to the issue of whether or not our experience can be adequately described. This chapter discusses four epistemological models of the relation between our concepts and our experience. These four models are (1) The Model of Immediate Experience (2) Constructivism (3) Hermeneutics and (4) the Yogic Model. Over time, and as his views changed, Abhishiktānanda used several of these models to describe his experience.

1. The Model of Immediate Experience

a) Romanticism

Romanticism developed in response to the rationalism of the Enlightenment. Some of its representatives include Blake, Wordsworth, Emerson, and Thoreau. They held that there are limits to rationalism; our experience is more than we can conceptualize. According to Romanticism, reality is 'immediately' given to us in our experience. Using our intuition, we can experience reality as a whole. This intuitively experienced wholeness is then broken up when we analyze that experience using concepts. Our intuition is blocked and veiled by our concepts; we need to pierce the 'veil' of concepts. As Blake says, "If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is: Infinite."[28]

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[27] See for example J. Moussaieff Masson: *The oceanic feeling: the origins of religious sentiment in ancient India,* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1980).

[28] William Blake: "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell", T*he Works of William Blake* (Wordsworth, 1994), p. 184.

We are born with the ability to intuit reality immediately. As Wordsworth says, "…trailing clouds of glory do we come from God, who is our home."[29] But our modern calculative thinking has resulted in our loss of these depths of experience. Romanticism therefore looks to the past to find these lost depths of experience. It also looks to children's experience, and to 'primitive' cultures that are supposedly unspoiled by conceptualizing.

Gadamer has criticized Romanticism as being irrationalistic. He says that in its opposition to rationalism, Romanticism takes the same schema of the conquest of *mythos* by *logos*, but it inverts the priority in favour of myth and symbol.[30] Because of this, Romanticism often cannot account for anything positive in science, and its own views, put in opposition to science, are often seen as 'irrational'. But because they have no other model of doing science, when Romantics do engage in theoretical work, they often use the same methods that they otherwise deplore. For example, some of the Indologists who had a romantic fascination with India adopted methodologies similar to those that had been objected to by the Romantic Movement.[31]

Gadamer also criticizes Romanticism as being subjectivistic. He says that the Romantic view–that we can have immediate experience–relies on an individual, subjective experience. Gadamer says that this view derives from an aesthetic model of subjective experience that first appeared in autobiographies. The idea of *Erlebnis* was introduced to describe the subject's life; *Erlebnis* was seen as an original and individual creative experience to which an artist or a poet could then give expression. Gadamer rejects this. For him, every *Erlebnis* is itself already determined *a priori* by pre-existing historical realities such as society, state and the entire heritage of the past. Gadamer's view is representative of what I will refer to as the Hermeneutic Model.

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[29] William Wordsworth: "Ode. Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood", *The New Oxford Book of English Verses*, ed. Helen Gardner, (Oxford, 1972), p. 509.

[30] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd revised edition, tr. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, (New York: Continuum, 1998), p. 273.

[31] Wilhelm Halbfass: "India and the Romantic Critique of the Present", *India and Europe* (Albany: State University of New York, 1988), pp. 69ff.

It is true that many of Abhishiktānanda's writings are autobiographical in describing his experience. Such writing, particularly as it appears in his *Diary*, is much more spontaneous than the more ramified writings of his theoretical work. Abhishiktānanda was conscious of using this autobiographical approach, although he was also troubled by his use of autobiography in describing *advaita*:

> All is biographical and nothing is! Everything comes from the experience of this tension, but everything has been rethought by the mind, in the halo of a double culture. The "I" naturally is literary. Who has the right to say "I" when he speaks of advaita?[32]

His concern about using the word 'I' seems to relate to the issue of subjectivism in relation to autobiographical writing. How can he, as an experiencing subject, write about an *advaitic* experience in which there can be no distinction between subject and object?

In view of Gadamer's criticism of autobiographical accounts of experience (*Erlebnis*), is Abhishiktānanda's writing too subjective, too individualistic and psychological? One response to Gadamer's criticism is that this fear of subjectivism and individualism is misplaced in *advaita*, because *advaita* destroys all such subjectivity and individuality. The 'I', Abhishiktānanda says, is literary. The true 'I' is the Self. This Self is not an individual, but the source of all individuality. Gadamer's response to this would likely be to point to similar attempts by Ranke and Schleiermacher to go beyond individuality in history by an "aesthetic-pantheistic" idea of understanding.[33] Gadamer rejects such pantheism. In contrast, Abhishiktānanda accepts, if not pantheism, a growing panentheism. The difference between the two views reflects a difference in underlying assumptions.

Wilber has also criticized Romanticism. He criticizes Romanticism for its view of enlightenment in terms of a return to something that is pre-personal; he sees this return as a regression in our psychological development. Wilber makes a distinction between a

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[32] *Letters*, p. 209. (OB 23.1.69).

[33] Hans-Georg Gadamer: *Truth and Method*, pp. 211-218. He refers at p. 211 to Ranke's view of history as "sympathy, co-knowledge of the universe."

consciousness that is pre-personal and a consciousness that is trans-personal.[34] Wilber's view is representative of what I will refer to as the Yogic Model.

Abhishiktānanda makes use of the model of Immediate Experience. He contrasts the experience and its "expression" in concepts: "There is only the Awakening. All that is "notional"–myths and concepts–is only its expression."[35] In one of his essays in *The Further Shore* he refers to intuition as more original than concepts:

> Intuitions, these flashes of light, which at their source defy expression, are transformed at the level at which they are grasped by mental reflection, into abstractions and ideas (…) Ideas, concepts, abstractions, reflections are never anything more than means of returning once more to the original intuition. That is the hidden norm to which they must be continually referred, rather than any reasoning which intuition infinitely transcends.[36]

Does this make Abhishiktānanda a romantic? Swami Devananda, a traditional Hindu, concludes that he was:

> I have read Abhishiktānanda's book [*The Further Shore]* carefully and am not bewitched. This man was a Christian romantic à la Rousseau camouflaged as a Hindu existentialist.[37]

Although he does refer to Heidegger and existentialism, Abhishiktānanda does not mention Rousseau or the Romantics. But he seems to have been aware of the dangers of romanticism, at least insofar as we may have a romantic view of India. Even in 1947, before he left India, he wrote,

> From here India, the land and its people, its heart and thought, are seen in a poetic haze; so on principle I am on my guard against mirage…[38]

Abhishiktānanda rejects this popular and superficial way of looking at India. He says that the meeting with India must be in the context of a meeting of hearts at the deepest level of

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[34] Ken Wilber: "The Pre/Trans Fallacy", in *Paths Beyond Ego: The Transpersonal Vision*, ed. Roger Walsh and Frances Vaughan (Tarcher, 1993), pp. 124ff.

[35] *Diary*, p. 386 (11.9.73). This was written only a few months before his death.

[36] "Approach to the Upanishads", *Further Shore*, (Delhi: ISPCK, 1975; reprinted with additions in 1984). p. 65.

[37] Letter dated Sept. 28, 1987 from Swami Devananda to Bede Griffiths (Abhishiktānanda's successor at Shantivanam). The letter is cited by Sita Ram Goel: *Catholic Ashrams: Sannyasins or Swindlers*? (New Delhi: Voice of India, 1988, revised 1994), p. 138.

[38] *Letters*, p. 17 (18.8.47).

our being. He criticizes the many young people at the time "on the road to Kathmandu", "in search of the sages and gurus of Rishikesh" who are disappointed because India does not fit into the framework of their own categories.[39]

But in this "meeting of hearts", Abhishiktānanda still emphasizes the priority of experience (*anubhava*) over concepts. This use of the word *anubhava* in the context of the idea of immediate experience is common in modern Hindu writings, or in what Hacker has referred to as "neo-Hinduism".[40] Hacker refers to Radhakrishnan as "the most typical neo-Hindu". Radhakrishnan was of the view that all genuine religious documents and scriptures have their origin in the immediate personal experience of "seers" or rishis.[41] Hacker suggests that these ideas of Radhakrishnan come not so much from Hindu sources as from his reading of William James.

Halbfass says that the idea of immediate experience is more obscure and ambivalent than is usually admitted.[42] He agrees with Hacker that the neo-Hindu emphasis on the personal experience of the rishis is something new to neo-Hinduism, and is not to be found in traditional Hinduism such as in the writings of Shankara. Traditional Hinduism holds to the priority of the revealed word of the Vedas. The use of the word *anubhava* in neo-Hinduism is therefore open to the criticism that it is due to the influence on neo-Hinduism of Western ideas.[43] In addition to William James, Radhakrishnan's sources include the ideas of F.H. Bradley, Henri Bergson and

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[39] Preface to *Guru*, p. viii. (1970). I can personally relate to this criticism, since I was one of those disappointed hippies in 1973. It was more than twenty years later that I was first able to see India differently.

[40] The term "neo-Hinduism", as used by the Indologist Paul Hacker, refers to the interpretation of Hinduism by Hindus in response to the concerns of the non-Hindu West, and using the terminology and assumptions of the West. For example, Hacker says that William James influenced Radhakrishnan. And Vivekānanda was influenced by Deussen, a disciple of Schopenhauer. Hacker contrasts neo-Hinduism with "surviving traditional Hinduism". This is represented by *pandit* literature, often written in Sanskrit, and by devotional tracts. It is often bitterly opposed to any Western interpretation of Hinduism. See Wilhelm Halbfass: *Philology and Confrontation* (State University of New York, 1995).

[41] Abhishiktānanda adopts this neo-Hindu view of Scripture as a record of experience or *anubhava*. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter IX of this thesis.

[42] Wilhelm Halbfass: "The Concept of Experience", *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding* (State University of New York, 1988), p. 379. Halbfass refers to Gadamer's statement that the concept of experience is among the least clarified concepts which we have. This applies not only to '*Erlebnis'*, which has subjective and emotional connotations, but also to the wider word for experience, '*Erfahrung'*.

[43] See also Anantanand Rambachan*: The Limits of Scripture:Vivekananda's Reinterpretaion of the Vedas* (University of Hawaii Press, 1994)

Baron F. von Hügel.[44] Even if these sources are different from Romanticism (I refer to them as post-Romantic), Hacker and Halbfass have therefore raised the issue of whether the idea of immediate experience is really more Western than Hindu.

Before we conclude that Abhishiktānanda's emphasis on immediate experience is due to Romanticism, we must look for other possible sources for this view. We will look at Hindu sources that pre-date the Romantic period and any European influence. We will also look at post-Romantic models of Immediate Experience such as that of James and Bergson.

b) Pre-Romantic Hindu Sources for the Model

Abhishiktānanda's emphasis on immediate experience was strongly influenced by the Indian sage Ramaṇa Maharshi. Ramaṇa's method of "self-enquiry", which is discussed in the next chapter, emphasizes the primacy of direct experience. In this it is similar to the Immediate Experience Model. Does this mean that Ramaṇa has also been influenced by Western ideas, like other neo-Hindus? It can be argued that Ramaṇa's emphasis on direct experience does not derive from European influence but rather from Hindu *advaitic* sources that pre-date the European Romantics by many centuries. Halbfass acknowledges that there are non-traditional *advaitic* sources that emphasize direct experience and that these sources are independent of any European influence.[45] He refers to the "vision" of the Vedic poets, and to the Upanishads, which show an early awareness of the four states of consciousness. These states are: waking, dreaming, sleeping and the fourth state *turīya* that is beyond the other three states..

Another pre-Romantic source of the importance of experience are the poets like Tūkārām and other "poet-saints" from Maharashtra who glorify personal experience or *anubhava*. Both Ramaṇa and Gnānānanda refer in their teachings to these poet saints, and to Tamil poet-saints.

There are also traditions in Yoga that emphasize direct experience. One source from these traditions is the *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha*. Another work that is popular among yogic practitioners of *advaita* is the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, a work that is often attributed to Shankara. As will be discussed

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[44] *Ibid*., p. 398.

[45] *Ibid*, p. 386. Halbfass himself questions whether these non-European sources are sufficient to support the claims of neo-Hinduism.

in Chapter III, both of these works strongly influenced Ramaṇa. The *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha* also influenced Gnānānanda. Abhishiktānanda was in turn influenced by both Ramaṇa and Gnānānanda. These sources are therefore direct or indirect influences for Abhishiktānanda's emphasis on immediate experience.

Buddhist traditions also emphasize the experiences and visions of the Buddha. And as Halbfass points out, the very title of the Buddha indicates an event of awakening, a "radical transformation of awareness." As we shall see, Abhishiktānanda was exposed to Buddhist thought. Western scholars also see the influence of Buddhism in Hindu works like the *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha*.

Another Hindu source that emphasizes immediate experience is Kashmir *Śaivism*, which emphasizes consciousness and internality.[46] It also pre-dates any possible European Romantic influence. As will be discussed in the next chapter, Abhishiktānanda was exposed to this influence through his *guru* Gnānānanda as well as through his reading of Lilian Silburn.

A traditional Hindu source emphasizing experience is the *Bhagavad Gītā*. It refers to Arjuna's direct experience of Krishna. This vision is said to be one that could not be attained by the Vedas or study (*BG* 11:48). The *Bhagavad Gītā* also refers to the experience of reaching the Self (BG 6:20). Abhishiktānanda expressly refers to this passage in relation to the necessity of a direct experience for oneself:

> No one will ever reach his own self except through himself and in the very depth of himself, as the Gita says: *ātmani ātmānam ātmanā*, the self sees the self in the self through the self. No creature, whatever it may be, can ever do more than lead you to the door of the sanctuary, invite you to enter, and then bow and disappear.[47]

In view of all these sources, it is unfair to dismiss Ramaṇa's use of the model of Immediate Experience as mere Romanticism. Whether or not Abhishiktānanda's use of this

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[46] Wilhelm Halbfass: "The Concept of Experience in the Encounter Between India and the West," *India and Europe*, p. 386. He says that this is so particularly for the *Pratyabbhijñā* school in Kashmir *Śaivism*. See the article by H.N. Cahkravart: "Divine Recognition: *Pratyabhijñā*", *Mysticism in Shaivism and Christianity*, ed. Bettina Bäumer (Abhishiktānanda Society, 1997), p. 179.

[47] *Guru*, p. 78.

model is consistent with his emphasis on non-monistic *advaita* is something that will be discussed in later chapters.

c) Post-Romantic Immediate Experience

There are other advocates of the model of Immediate Experience who differ from Romanticism in that they do not merely reverse the rationalist schema, but set up alternative theories of concept formation. Bergson speaks of the 'immediacy' of experience. He says that there is a dynamism to our experience. This dynamism in every experience is an undivided consciousness or *durée* that cannot be wholly captured by our concepts. We cannot stop human life to investigate its essence; our experience is irreducible to thought. The development of an idea moves from our intuition to cognition. We can move from intuition to analysis, but not from analysis to intuition. We cannot pass from the word, concept or procedure to its original.[48]

William James also refers to an immediate experience that is prior to any conceptualizing. Our immediate experience is based on a "pure perception" prior to all division into subject and object. This pure perception is the basis of James's radical empiricism. Pure perception is immediate knowledge. James makes a distinction between this immediate knowledge, which he calls "knowledge by acquaintance", and our "knowledge about" something by means of concepts:

> There are two ways of knowing things, knowing them immediately or intuitively, and knowing them conceptually or representatively.[49]

The knowledge that we have by eating an apple is different from and superior to our knowledge about an apple without tasting it. Our immediate experience (knowledge by acquaintance) is foundational to any subsequent abstraction or conceptualization. The conceptual is artificial, abstract. To know mediately or conceptually is a "representation" of that which was originally experienced.

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[48] Henri Bergson: *The Introduction to a New Philosophy*, tr. Sidney Littman (Boston: John W. Luce and Co., 1912), p. 57, cited by Sunnia D. Kidd and James W. Kidd: *Experiential Method: Qualitative Research in the Humanities using Metaphysics and Phenomenology* (New York: Peter Lang, 1990). p. 58, ft. 12.

[49] William James: *The Meaning of Truth: A Sequel to 'Pragmatism'* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1914), p. 43 cited by Kidd, *op. cit.*, pp. 73, 74.

Gadamer's criticism of irrationality may not apply to James, at least not in the same way that it applies to the Romantics. James does not just invert the priority between rational concept and intuitive experience; he sets out a new epistemology of 'pure perception.' And he insists that there is a 'noetic' element in immediate experience–it is experienced as a kind of knowing. The criticism of subjectivity may also not apply to James. His theory allows for an experience that is prior to any subject/object division. This rules out any initial subjectivity. Furthermore, James's view of the self is not individualistic, but extends outwards to the world. It is connected with other human beings and the surrounding environment.[50] His theory also speaks of this being a trans-personal experience, and therefore one that is not caught by *individual* subjectivity.

The model of Immediate Experience is currently not in fashion among scholars. However, there has been a renewed interest in James's ideas of 'pure perception'.[51] And, as already discussed, there are many pre-Romantic sources that speak of immediate experience. This model therefore cannot be disregarded in our examination of Abhishiktānanda's *advaitic* experience.

d) Symbol and myth

The Model of Immediate Experience says that our experience is more than can ever be expressed in concepts. How then can we even speak of the experience? The answer usually given is that we can use symbols to "point to" the experience. Symbols may be contrasted with signs. Signs have a fixed, unambiguous meaning in pointing to objects of our thought. Symbols point beyond objects and even beyond our language.[52] They therefore point beyond themselves to what cannot be said. The symbols we use never exhaust the experience that they refer to.

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[50] G. William Barnard: *Exploring Unseen Worlds: William James and the Philosophy of Mysticism* (Albany: State University of New York, 1997) pp. 150-152.

[51] In addition to Barnard, I would refer to Wilber and Krüger. Despite Wilber's criticism of Romanticism, he defends the idea of immediate experience, using James's ideas of pure experience. See Ken Wilber: *The Eye of Spirit: An Integral Vision for a World Gone Slightly Mad*, Boston: Shambhala, 1998), pp. 5,6. James's idea of pure consciousness is also used by J.S. Krüger in *Along Edges*, pp. 41ff.

[52] Krüger says that signs are fixed, unambiguous and fully known. 'Symbol' derives from the etymology 'putting together'. Symbols are a way of connecting things and of showing "the unfathomableness of reality." J.S. Krüger: *Along Edges*, p.p. 65-67. Krüger says that symbolic integration is "below the level of analytical, conceptual thought." Similar ideas of Jung will be discussed in the Appendix of this thesis.

This is why poets can continue to write about experiences that cannot be fully expressed in anything that they may write. Mythological language is a storehouse of such symbols.[53]

The use of symbolism is opposed to literalism. Fundamentalist interpretations of religious use language literally (always as signs). There is also a secular literalism that refuses to admit the symbolic use of language. This includes the behavioural and social scientists, as well as medical materialists who say that religion is "nothing but" a matter of disordered physiology. Wulff says that these methods often match the fundamentalist's scriptural literalism with an opposing literalism of their own, failing to see the possibilities of metaphor or nonscientific language.[54] Because such behavioral scientists no longer believe in what they assume to be the literal referents of religious words, they lose sight of the possibility that these words refer to truths for which there is no literal language.

Abhishiktānanda clearly believed that the *advaitic* experience is ineffable. Even in his early (1942) manuscript *Amour et Sagesse,* he speaks of "beyond, beyond!" In many of his writings, Abhishiktānanda speaks of this difficulty of expressing the ineffable. He says that any description of the ineffable is in the realm of *nāmarūpa*, names and forms.[55] Words cannot describe what is beyond all names and forms. Like others who hold to the Model of Immediate experience, Abhishiktānanda frequently uses symbols (and poetry) to point to this experience that he says cannot be expressed in words. In this thesis I will attempt to open up the meaning of these symbols and poetry.

e) Perennial Philosophy

The model of Immediate Experience is often related to the idea of a Perennial Philosophy. That view holds that there is available to us an immediate religious or mystical experience which has common core characteristics across different religions.[56] This common

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[53] Jung's idea of the collective unconscious points to this idea of a common storehouse of symbols.

[54] David M. Wulff: *Psychology of Religion: Classic and Contemporary Views* (New York: Wiley, 1991).

[55] Rudolf Otto refers to *nāmarūpa*. *Mysticism East and West* (Macmillan 1970, first published 1932),. p. 26, ft. 16; also p. 78. We know that Abhishiktānanda read this book.

[56] For examples of perennial philosophy, see Aldous Huxley: *Perennial Philosophy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1945), W.T. Stace: *Mysticism and Philosophy* (London: Macmillan, 1981) and Ken Wilber: "The Great Chain of

religious experience is then 'expressed' differently using different concepts and cultural forms. Frequently, the experience is described as an experience of 'Ultimate Reality', or an experience of the true nature of reality. Often this is said to be an experience beyond time and space, an experience of the 'Eternal', or the 'Eternal Now'. It is also often described as an experience beyond the sense of personal identity and as an experience beyond subject and object.

The Indian philosopher Radhakrishnan describes *advaita* in terms of this idea of a perennial philosophy. The term *sanātanadharma* ("eternal teaching") is used to refer to India's perennial philosophy. But according to Halbfass, the idea of a perennial philosophy is not to be found in traditional Hinduism, but is rather a feature of neo-Hinduism. It is a borrowing from the West. Traditional Hinduism did not teach a harmony between Hinduism and other religions. Shankara had sharp disputes with Buddhism. And traditional Hinduism was xenophobic in its treatment of the *mleccha* or foreigner.[57]

Abhishiktānanda's position on perennial philosophy is not straightforward. He says that religions are different approaches to the fundamental *advaitic* experience:

> All these [religions] are different approaches of the mind to the mystery that is impenetrable to the mind. Truth is beyond, non-dual, ultimate, transcendently real [*advaita paramārthatā*].[58]

In 1966 he says that the *advaitic* experience underlies all true mysticism, Christian included.[59] Initially he tries to find parallels between Christianity and Vedānta. This is especially evident in his book *Saccidānanda.* But by 1970, he had rejected this approach. He says that one must begin with the experience itself:

> The whole subject should be taken up again, starting from the Vedantin experience, and not–as I have so far done, or rather written–from the "Christian faith" and its "symbolization" [in Creeds] by the [Ecumenical] Councils; like a kind of hypothesis which is followed through to the end.[60]

Being", in *Paths Beyond Ego: The Transpersonal Vision*, ed. Roger Walsh and Frances Vaughan (Tarcher, 1993), pp. 214ff.

[57] Wilhelm Halbfass: "The Concept of Experience in the Encounter Between India and the West", *India and Europe*, pp. 172-196, 252, 253, 345-348.

[58] *Diary*, p. 95 (2.7.54).

[59] *Letters*, p. 205 (RP, 15.7.66).

[60] *Letters*, p. 270 (OB, 23.12.70).

He continued to believe in one common experience underlying religions. But although religions may have a common experience, they cannot be reconciled at the level of concepts. He says,

> More and more I am seeing how Christianity is founded, rooted, in the Jewish culture and mentality. There are no non-cultural religions. All our attempts at reinterpreting John have remained on the surface. We have to descend into the ultimate depths to recognize that there is no common denominator at the level of *namarupa* [names and forms]. So we should accept *namarupa* of the most varied kinds. And play the game with them in the same manner as the Lord does with the worlds. We should penetrate to the depth of each one's mystery, and accept the relativity of all formulations.[61]

Abhishiktānanda says that on the theoretical and conceptual level, the different religions collide. There can therefore be no perennial philosophy in terms of concepts. Accepting the relativity of religious formulations means holding the doctrines of both Christianity and Vedanta in tension.[62] Abhishiktānanda attempted to hold both in tension, although he came to prefer more and more the Vedāntic to the Christian formulations.

2. Constructivism

Whereas the model of Immediate Experience was a reaction against rationalism, the Constructivist Model is in turn a reaction against the model of Immediate Experience. Constructivism is the dominant model used today in Religious Studies, at least in North America. The model is represented by the article by Katz, "Language, Epistemology and Mysticism"[63] For Katz, there is no experience that is not mediated, and there is no such thing as a Perennial Philosophy. Katz says we must pay attention to the 'context' of the experience; he makes a "plea for recognition of differences." For him, the Hindu experience of *Brahman* and the Christian experience of God are not the same; different concepts and beliefs mediate each experience. In Katz's view, the Hindu *advaitic* experience is not beyond all concepts. It is not a deconditioning

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[61] Letters p. 284 (26.1.73).

[62] Mehta speaks of the tension in his own life between his Hinduism and Western modernity. "I avoided as best I could a clash between the two on the conceptual level, letting the process of parallel appropriation proceed unimpeded." *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 215.

[63] Steven D. Katz: "Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism", *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis* (London: Sheldon, 1978).

or unconditioning from concepts. Rather, it is an experience that has been reconditioned by other concepts given by gurus or religious teachers. These teachers explain to the student what the experience is supposed to be like, and the goal that is to be reached.

According to Katz, all our experience (including our religious experience) is "shaped", "formed", and "mediated" by the beliefs, concepts and language that we bring to the experience. He says,

> …the experience itself as well as the form in which it is reported is shaped by concepts which the mystic brings to, and which shape, his experience. (…) the forms of consciousness which the mystic brings to an experience set structured and limiting parameters on what the experience will be, i.e. on what will be experienced, and rule out in advance what is 'inexperienceable' in the particular, given, concrete context.[64]

These limiting parameters are our concepts. The exact way that our experience is 'shaped' by our concepts is not set out in any detail by Katz. Katz's basic notion of the 'mediation' of our experience by our thought is not proved, but rather assumed *a priori* at the outset of the article. He does not define or show how the mediating takes place. Apart from the metaphor of 'shaping' he does not give any detailed epistemology.[65] Katz acknowledges that he relies on a "Kantian idiom." He states that the idea of a non-mediated experience is, "if not self-contradictory, at best empty" He also says that there is no "veridical truth" unless there is data. These views are very similar to Kant's statement that thoughts without content are empty intuitions without concepts are blind. Our concepts are 'empty' without something objective, sensible. And our concepts give form to the data from the manifold of sense impressions.

But Katz goes beyond even a Kantian epistemology in his emphasis on the power of concepts. Kant said that our conceptual categories give form to the manifold of sense impressions that are given by our intuition. But for Kant, these conceptual categories were universal.[66] These universal categories include the concepts of substance and of causation. In Kant's philosophy, these universal categories do not add any content to the synthetic concept.

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[64] Katz, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

[65] The criticisms of Katz that follow are taken from the collection of essays edited by K.C. Forman: *The Problem of Pure Consciousness: Mysticism and Philosophy* (Oxford, 1990).

[66] For Kant, there were also forms on the intuition side. These are the sensory forms of space and time.

Katz, in saying that different concepts 'constitute' different experiences, is not using concepts in this universal sense.[67] He says that different concepts (or belief sets) *give different content* to the experiences. There is no "given" that we experience: "All 'givens' are also the product of the processes of 'choosing', 'shaping', and 'receiving'."[68]

In this way, Katz goes well beyond anything that Kant suggested or which can be justified using a Kantian epistemology.[69] If there is no "given" that is not mediated by our concepts, then the Kantian theory of knowledge is no longer appropriate, and it does not make sense to even speak of the "mediating" character of experience. Perovich concludes that this is a hyper-Kantian view that must be proved and not just assumed.

Forman also criticizes Constructivism. He says that Katz does not explain whether every change in our belief sets will result in a changed experience.[70] If not every change in belief means a change in experience, then it is open to the perennialist to argue that *samādhi* and *śūnyatā* are close enough conceptually, and that the underlying experience is the same. This is something that Katz does not want to admit. On the other hand, if as Katz says, every change in beliefs results in a change in experience, what does this mean? Is the entire experience of that person different? If I learn a new concept, does that make my everyday experience different? How different? If my experience is changed by every concept I have, how can Katz avoid a totally idealist position, or even a solipsistic position? Do we not have to say, in response to Constructivism, that in our experience we come up against a reality that we do not construct?

Constructivism also cannot account for novelty in one's experience. If my experience is constituted and constructed by my pre-existing beliefs, then how can I ever have a new,

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[67] Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago, 1970) is often pointed to as another example of showing that non-universal concepts can constitute our experience. It is often said that this work shows that 'paradigms' are culturally constructed and not discovered, and that these paradigms are incommensurable. Wilber maintains that Kuhn never intended his use of 'paradigm' to be used in this way, and that Kuhn has strenuously objected to its use in this way. Because of these misunderstandings, Kuhn himself later abandoned the term 'paradigm'. See Ken Wilber: *The Marriage of Sense and Soul*, (New York: Random House, 1998), pp. 26-30.

[68] Katz, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

[69] This criticism of the Constructivist Model is based on the article by Anthony N. Perovich, Jr.: "Does the Philosophy of Mysticism rest on a Mistake?" *The Problem of Pure Consciousness*, ed. Robert K.C. Forman (Oxford, 1990).

[70] Robert K.C. Forman, "Mysticism, Constructivis and Forgetting", *The Problem of Pure Consciousness*, pp. 3ff.

surprising, unexpected experience? And yet such surprise is precisely what many mystics report.[71] They report what may be called 'mystical heresy'. This is when a subject experiences something totally contrary to his or her previous beliefs. How can this be if the experience is formed by the belief? Katz's answer is that the new experience must be due to concepts that the subject has heard before. But this is an *a priori* denial of the possibility of a new experience.

Constructivism also does not account for spontaneous visions, or for unconscious psychic activity that becomes manifested. If beliefs are primary, why do people have experiences arising from their unconscious which cannot be traced to their conceptual beliefs? Constructivism cannot account for such new experiences arising from the unconscious.

If the Constructivist Model is true, then we cannot ever share the same experience, because we all have our own beliefs and concepts. Experiences are 'incommensurable'. If experience is incommensurable, then there is no common experience to appeal to, and no way to choose among various sets of beliefs that structure the experience. There is an emphasis only on difference. There is no way to advocate one theory over another. Whether or not a given theory is accepted will depend on sociological grounds–such as ideology, class, prejudice, gender, race, power, or whatever interests that are in fashion at the time. The loudest voice, or the most powerful voice, will win, and that is really all that can be said.[72] Indeed, based on incommensurability, we cannot even say that any two experiences are of the same *kind*.[73] In this way, the Constructivist Model takes away the possibility of any comparison among religions. It then becomes impossible to compare Abhishiktānanda's *advaitic* experience with other *kinds* of nonduality.

I do not use the Constructivist Model in this thesis. On an *a priori* basis, Katz denies the possibility of any experience going beyond our concepts. Katz says that every religious

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[71] See Forman, *op. cit*., pp. 19-21.

[72] See Wilber, *The Marriage of Sense and Soul*, p. 27. We cannot privilege our own position. Jane Flax makes this point with regard to the feminist use of Constructivism: "We cannot simultaneously claim (1) that the mind, the self, and knowledge are socially constituted and that what we can know depends upon our social practices and contexts and (2) that feminist theory can uncover the truth of the whole once and for all." (Cited by Grace Jantzen: *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 348. Jantzen's book is an example of a constructivist view of religious experience. Although she expresses reservations about the fact that it will result in relativism and power relations, she nevertheless privileges her position on the grounds that one must choose something.

[73] See Perovich, *op. cit.*, p. 271.

experience is mediated by our concepts. But the *advaitic* traditions insist that there is an experience that is beyond any concepts. Katz denies this self-understanding of these other religious traditions. He is therefore imposing his own cultural viewpoint (an over-valuation of conceptual thought) on those other traditions.

3. Hermeneutics

a) Everyday Experience

The Hermeneutic Model is often confused with the Constructivist Model. It is in fact quite different. The Hermeneutic Model makes a distinction between our everyday experience and our conceptual experience. Our everyday experience is not 'formed' by our conceptual experience. Everyday experience can be appealed to apart from our conceptual framework; it provides the 'understanding' that is the basis for our concepts.[74] There is thus less of an emphasis on incommensurability of the experience of others, and more of an emphasis on commonality of at least parts of our experience.

In appealing to an experience that is not just conceptual, the Hermeneutic Model has some commonalities with the Immediate Experience Model. But the Hermeneutic Model places more emphasis on the linguisticity of even our everyday experience.

One way of separating our experience into conceptual and pre-conceptual is to emphasize that our conceptual thinking is an action that we do. The forming of concepts is then only one of our actions. Our intellectual activity of understanding "must itself be understood as part of, and subordinate to, a wider whole encompassing the human person as a thinking, feeling and acting being."[75] Our everyday world is

> …the kind of world in which we do certain things, have certain things and see certain things. You may theorize before that or after that. We are not talking of

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[74] For Heidegger, "…interpretation is grounded on understanding and is only the explicit cultivation and carrying through of the latter." J.L. Mehta: *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 202. This idea of 'understanding' probably derives from Schleiermacher's hermeneutics and on Dilthey's idea of world-and-life views. The idea of an implicit versus an explicit knowledge may also be seen in Michael Polanyi: *Personal Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1958) and in David Bohm: *Wholeness and the Implicate Order* (London: Routledge, 1980).

[75] J.L. Mehta: "Problems of Understanding", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, 268.

> beliefs and commonsense but we are talking of a level which is not merely cognitive or purely cognitive.[76]

Another way of separating everyday experience from conceptual experience is to say that our conceptual knowledge is a different kind of knowledge than our everyday thinking. Everyday experience is the way we live as we experience it in living before we think about it. When we think about our experience, we are not having the same experience anymore. In concepts, we re-present the experience to our minds (or as Heidegger puts it, playing on the German word for representation, there is a *Vor-Stellung*). Concepts are dominated by system-building, by our trying to take possession of objects through conceptualization. In contrast to our everyday experience, concepts are objectifying or representational, a 'grasping' of an object before us.[77]

Conceptual or representational thinking comes from the Greek '*eidos';* representational thinking is a technique, to force what is being presented to us into a representation. This forcing, or metaphysical thinking, separates us from being. This type of metaphysical conceptuality is not adequate to describe or capture our life experience in its actuality:

> Metaphysical thinking, as the attempt to freeze into concepts and so immobilize what *is* as something present, as *eidos* or as an objective presence in front of us, can only falsify and distort our apprehension of the movement that is life.[78]

Our everyday knowledge is based on 'lived experience', on concrete experience, our common life-world, the ground-structure of the human *Lebenswelt* as such. Our everyday experience gives us an 'understanding'. Theory depends on this pre-conceptual understanding. Our everyday experience of things is not objectifying.[79] Neither is this lived experience something that we construct. Mehta cites Heidegger:

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[76] J.L. Mehta: "Life-Worlds, Sacrality & Interpretive Thinking", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 232.

[77] J.L. Mehta: "Heidegger's Debts to Dilthey's Hermeneutics and Husserl's Phenomenology", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, pp. 47,48. Heidegger plays on the German word for comprehending. 'Begreifen' is a 'Be-Greifen', to have in one's grip.

[78] J.L. Mehta: "Life Worlds, Sacrality & Interpretive Thinking", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 213. Cf. Krüger, *Along Edges*, p. 127: "conceptual cognition creates a split between the knowing subject and the known object. It observes and analyses from a distance, and abstracts from the warm stuff of life."

[79] J.L. Mehta: "The Saving Leap", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, 98, ft. 14.

> To undergo an experience with something—be it a thing, a person, or a god—means that this something befalls us, strikes us, comes over us, overwhelms and transforms us. When we talk of "undergoing" an experience, we mean specifically that the experience is not of our own making; to undergo here means that we endure it, suffer it, receive it as it strikes us and submit to it. It is this something itself that comes about, comes to pass, happens.[80]

Because our everyday experience is not constructed, it can transform us and transform our beliefs. We respond to that which shows itself, to what manifests itself and addresses us. And also because of this shared lived experience, there is no ultimate incommensurability of experience. There is a bottom level out of which our intellectual and conceptual activities arise as we immediately experience things.[81] It is a common horizon, a cluster of experiences of which it seems all humanity has testified to in history, apart from theological and theoretical considerations.[82] There is a common life-world, of which Christian, Hindu and Chinese can be shown to be specifications and derivations. We are all human beings and talking beings who are not only capable of translating from one language to another but are of necessity doing it all the time.[83] There is therefore a perennial experience, although not a perennial philosophy in the sense of a finished system; explication of the experience is an unfinished and ongoing enterprise.

b) Linguisticity is not necessarily Conceptual

But just because our everyday experience is different from concepts does not mean it is without language. There can be a non-conceptual use of language:

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[80] Heidegger: *On the Way to Language* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 57. Cited by J.L. Mehta: "Heidegger and Vedanta", *India and the West: The Problem of Understanding,* p. 252. This emphasis on lived experience can be traced to Dilthey's views of immediate experience. J.L. Mehta: "Heidegger's Debts to Dilthey and Husserl's Phenomenology", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, pp. 35ff.

[81] J.L. Mehta: "Life-Worlds, Sacrality and Interpretive Thinking", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 230.

[82] J.L. Mehta: "Postmodern Problems East/West", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 245.

[83] J.L. Mehta: "Life-Worlds, Sacrality and Interpretive Thinking", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 214. Cf. Krüger's idea of 'homoversals', the common symbols of our shared human nature. J.S. Krüger: *Along Edges*, pp. 89, 280.

> The saying of language is not necessarily a statement of propositions about objects, but is rather a co-responding to what shows itself, to what manifests itself and addresses us.[84]

This non-conceptual language is the language of myth and symbol. At first sight, this seems similar to Immediate Experience. But the difference is that the Hermeneutic Model sees our pre-conceptual state as itself linguistic. In the model of Immediate Experience, language divides reality up into subject and object. But in the Hermeneutic Model, language still allows for the unity of subject and object. For Heidegger, language is the place where subject and object are at home together prior to being split asunder by conscious reflection.[85]

The splitting up of reality is done not by language but by our concepts. There is a kind of language where subject and object are undifferentiated. Myth and symbol are at the undifferentiated level:

> …the quest for a single all-encompassing life-world must begin, to be fruitful, not at the level of conceptual differentiation, where one will find only differences, but at the pre-conceptual level of myth, legend and symbol."[86]

Our myths are what we take for granted and thus do not question. With regard to myth, Panikkar says, "We find it so unquestionable, we believe in it so much, that we do not even believe that we believe in it."[87] Panikkar also accepts the view that our experience is linguistic even if not conceptual. For him, this experience is given by symbol:

> It is in the symbol that the real appears to us. It is not reality (which never exists naked, as it were) but its manifestation, its revelation. The symbol is not another 'thing', but the epiphany of that 'thing' which is-not without some symbol–because ultimately Being itself is the final symbol. Any real symbol encompasses and unites both the symbolised 'thing' and the consciousness of it.[88]

Although Abhishiktānanda emphasizes immediate experience, he also refers in several places to the deep linguistic structures of our experience:

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[84] J.L. Mehta: "The Saving Leap", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p, 98, ft. 14.

[85] Joel C. Weinsheimer: *Gadamer's Hermeneutics: A Reading of Truth and Method* (Yale, 1985), p. 249.

[86] J.L. Mehta: "Life-Worlds, Sacrality & Interpretive Thinking", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 214.

[87] Raimon Panikkar, Introduction to *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. xix. See also Raimon Panikkar: *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics: Cross-Cultural Studies* (Paulist Press, 1979), p. 4.

[88] Raimon Panikkar: *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1973), p. ix.

> Every experience is already developed at the level of the phenomenal consciousness. But the experience of *advaita* is there with an absolutely minimal degree of development. As for the Trinitarian experience, it is highly developed. I have said and written that it required the agency of a concept (therefore a revealed one?). That is perhaps too much. We must grant their full value to the myth and the archetype, since they are pre-conceptual much closer to the primary zones of consciousness.[89]

On first reading, this passage suggests a movement away from the Model of Immediate Experience to the Hermeneutic Model. If the experience is "already developed", that would seem to suggest that the experience no longer primary. But Abhishiktānanda does not say that the experience requires a concept.[90] He points instead to a pre-conceptual development of the experience by myth and archetype. Furthermore, the English translation of the *Diary* is a bit misleading here. The words "Every experience is already developed" are ambiguous in that they can mean either that there is development before the experience or that there has been development after the experience. In the original French, he speaks of the experience not as developed, but as *élaborée*, elaborated. Elaboration of an experience suggests that the experience comes first and is then elaborated. This is supported by the final sentence, where he says that the myths and archetypes are "much closer to the original zones (*zones originaires)* of consciousness." That suggests that there is a primary experience, an original consciousness. When we move from that original consciousness, the experience is elaborated (or ramified). *Advaitic* thought is far less elaborated than Christian thought. How the experience is elaborated depends on the culture in which the experience is expressed:

> …for the manifestations of this experience are strictly conditioned by the cultural and "religious" environment in which it develops, or '*happens*'.[91]

This interpretation of experience being elaborated by archetypes and myths, and finally by concepts, is supported by other writings of Abhishiktānanda. He says that archetypes arise at the origin of human consciousness. They are fundamental forces (*pulsions*) of being. Our

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[89] *Diary*, p. 289, (23.11.66).

[90] His reference to an earlier writing may be to *Meeting Point*, which he wrote a year earlier. On p. 9 of that work he asks whether it is possible, apart from revelation, to attain to the fullness of the Christian Trinitarian experience. But on that same page he speaks of the necessity of harmonizing our conceptual formulations with the mystery that is revealed in our inmost being. This also seems to suggest the Immediate Experience model.

[91] D*iary*, p. 315 (9.7.70). The French original reads "par le milieu culturel et "religieux" où elle se déploie (où elle arrive, *happens*)."

experience necessarily manifests itself in archetypes. The spontaneous *élan* of our nature towards Self is manifested in religious archetypes, like the sacred, the numinous. These archetypes free psychical energy that is extraordinarily powerful and reveal the mystery of man, the universe and God. The archetypes are released in symbols. Over time, the archetypes crystallize in conceptual formulas, rituals and religious rules (*dharma*). This results in a "sclerosis" of religious archetypes, to a conceptual and sociological sedimentation.[92] Abhishiktānanda says that we must go back to the original experience or intuition, beyond the cultural formulations and rites of religion, beyond all expression and even beyond the archetypes.[93]

> Every religion is rooted in a culture, beginning with the most primordial and hidden archetypes which necessarily govern its view of the world. All that is *citta* [thought] is *nāmarūpa*. And every *nāmarūpa* has to be laid bare, so that the *satyam* [Real] may be unveiled. What a savage but marvellous purification![94]

This "going beyond" concepts, myths and archetypes is for Abhishiktānanda the same as a return to the original intuition of Immediate Experience. But in our concrete situation, we begin in the context of a religion that is conditioned by culture. We begin with concepts, myths and archetypes, but we must go beyond or transcend them. This points to the Yogic Model that I will discuss.

c) Critique of the Hermeneutic Model

One criticism of the Hermeneutic Model is that it is not consistent in its emphasis on the linguisticity of our everyday experience. Gadamer says:

> Of course, the fundamental linguisticality of understanding cannot possibly mean that all experiencing of the world takes place only as language and in language. All too well known are those prelinguistic and metalinguistic dawnings, dumbnesses, and silences in which the immediate meeting with the world expresses itself. And who would deny that there are real conditions to human life?[95]

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[92] "Archétypes religieux, expérience du soi et théologie chrétienne", (1970), I*ntériorité*, pp. 177ff. See also *Diary* , p. 233 regarding archetypes and symbols.

[93] "Archétypes religieux, expérience du soi et théologie chrétienne", (1970), I*ntériorité*, pp. 182, 183.

[94] *Letters*, p. 285 (MC 26.1.73).

[95] Hans-Georg Gadamer: *Philosophical Apprenticeships* (MIT, 1985), p. 179.

What are these "prelinguistic and metalinguistic dawnings, dumbnesses, and silences?" This looks like the pre-conceptual awareness in the Immediate Experience Model. But the difference is that, although the Hermeneutic Model acknowledges these pre-linguistic dawnings, they are not "actual knowledge." Gadamer affirms his adherence to Kant's conclusions in *The Critique of Pure Reason*. Gadamer says,

> I regard statements that proceed by wholly dialectical means from the finite to the infinite, from human experience to what exists in itself, from the temporal to the eternal, as doing no more than setting limits, and am convinced that philosophy can derive no actual knowledge from them.[96]

For Kant, only that which can be in the mode of an object can count as something that we can know. This restricts "actual knowledge" to what can be identified as an object, to beings rather than Being. There can be no actual knowledge of the pre-linguistic or the meta-linguistic. There can therefore be no actual knowledge of the 'ineffable". To speak of the 'ineffable' is itself a relative statement.[97]

Restricting actual knowledge to beings also means that our knowledge is restricted to what is in time. But is this necessarily the case? Why should we *a priori* rule out any knowledge of what is beyond time? This knowledge may not be conceptual knowledge, but it may nevertheless be real knowledge.

Mehta's primary criticism of the Hermeneutic model is that it does not adequately explain our sense of mystery and enchantment, our need for the transcendent. Jackson, the editor of *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, refers to Mehta's "refusal to relinquish a hold on or concern for the transcendent":

> Is Mehta out of synch with the deconstructionist fashions of postmodernism which embrace multiplicity but abandon traditional unity, meaning, center, and are suspicious of the transcendent of specialists in the sacred? His view of postmodern consciousness included the concern for regaining an enchanting world.[98]

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[96] Hans-Georg Gadamer, Foreword to the Second Edition, *Truth and Method*, tr. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, (New York: Continuum, 1998), p. xxxvi.

[97] Hans-Georg Gadamer, Foreword to the Second Edition of *Truth and Method*, pp. xxxiv, xxxv.

[98] William J. Jackson, Introduction to *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 20. Jackson does point out that Mehta was aware of and read those of a contrary view, like Derrida.

Although Mehta was aware of postmodern critiques of transcendence, he refers in many places to the importance of recovering the dimension of the holy. The price paid for progress has been a loss of the holy, a disenchantment and desacralization, the making of nature into an object.[99] But the capacity for transcendence is just as much a part of humanity as is the capacity for conceptuality:

> Going beyond, the movement of self-surpassing, is as much constitutive of the human state as defining and setting up boundaries. It is this self-transcending movement, this reaching out and reaching down within, inherent in man, which defines him as *homo religiosus*, a bridge thrown across, from the realm of the visible to another shore.[100]

This emphasis on transcendence is found in the model advocated by Mehta, the Yogic Model.

4. The Yogic Model

The Yogic Model makes a threefold distinction: (1) our everyday experience (2) conceptual experience and (3) meditative experience.[101] In meditative experience, we can reach a reality that is not only beyond concepts, but also beyond language and subjectivity. There is a transcendent reality that can be reached, a realm of experience beyond duality that is attained only by meditation.

The Yogic Model differs from the model of Immediate Experience in that it acknowledges that we may *begin* with language and the word, and not with a 'pure experience' beyond language. But although we may begin with language and symbol, we can move to a higher experience. From word we can move to theory. But we can move beyond both language and theory to a transcendent realm. And this move is what Indian thought emphasizes:

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[99] J.L. Mehta: *Philosophy and Religion: Essays in Interpretation*, p. 202. Mehta speaks of a reductivism in PR 97.

[100] J.L. Mehta: "Beyond Believing and Knowing", *India and the West: the Problem of Understanding*, p. 203.

[101] These three divisions seems to correspond to Wilber's distinction between (1) the eye of flesh (empiricism), (2) the eye of reason (science) and (3) the eye of meditation. See Ken Wilber, "Eye to Eye: Science and Transpersonal Psychology", in *Paths Beyond Ego: The Transpersonal Vision*, ed. Roger Walsh and Frances Vaughan (Tarcher, 1993), pp. 184ff. Similarly, Rothberg says there are several epistemologies: (1) Naturalistic (empirical), (2) Interpretive: both (a) contextual (relativistic) and (b) universal (searching for deep structures) and (3) Meditative. See Donald Rothberg: "Contemporary Epistemology and the Study of Mysticism", *The Problem of Pure Consciousness*, pp. 163ff. Rothberg's interpretative category would seem to include both what I have called the Constructivist position (contextual, relativistic) and the Hermeneutic (universal deep structures).

> In the Indian tradition of Advaita Vedanta and Buddhist philosophy, knowledge in the highest sense is immediate, an experienced reality in which the duality of knowing subject and known object lapses. The lower, empirical, knowledge of entities in the world is mediated by language, concepts and categories, though even here, according to some schools, the conceptual activity of the mind is more a hindrance than an indispensable means of knowing.[102]

The Yogic Model differs from the Hermeneutic Model in its emphasis on the transcendent. The Hermeneutic Model can be criticized for considering all non-theoretical modes of experience to be pre-conceptual. It misses what Wilber calls the movement to the post-conscious or trans-personal.[103] The Yogic Model specifically acknowledges this move in consciousness beyond the conceptual and beyond the personal. The realm beyond thought is the state of consciousness known as the *turīya*. In meditation, this new level of consciousness is reached. It is beyond any dualistic distinctions, and is historically unconditioned.[104]

As an example from the West, Mehta points to Thomas Aquinas, who fell into total silence after he had a direct experience, unmediated by language or concepts, of the supreme vision. He said, "All that I have written seems to me nothing but straw compared to what I have seen and what has been revealed to me."[105] Mehta does not hesitate to use the word 'transcendence':

> All times are times of crisis (that is life), to which the creative thinker, poet and saint respond by lifting themselves above time's ever-present immediacies, liberating themselves from them, focusing in a direction away from them–call it transcendence or inwardness–and *only so* saving people from being sucked up in the morass of the historical situation's contingent particularities.[106]

Some interpreters of Heidegger see a similar emphasis by him on the transcendent. Heidegger does not himself favour the word 'transcendent'; for him, the concept of transcendence has its origin in the attempt to represent objects, in view of their Being. The

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[102] J.L. Mehta: "Beyond Believing and Knowing", *India and the West: The Problem of Understanding*, p. 205.

[103] Ken Wilber: "The Pre/Trans Fallacy", in *Paths Beyond Ego: The Transpersonal Vision*, ed. Roger Walsh and Frances Vaughan (Tarcher, 1993), pp. 124ff.

[104] J.L. Mehta: "The Saving Leap", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, pp. 92, 93.

[105] J.L. Mehta: "Sri Aurobindo: Life, Language and Yoga", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 157.

[106] J.L. Mehta: "Postmodern Problems East/West", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition,* p. 244.

concept of transcendence is 'metaphysical' in character, and inappropriate to an attempt to think of Being as such.[107] But Heidegger makes a threefold distinction that is similar to the Yogic Model. He distinguishes among (1) everyday experience, (2) theory, and (3) 'authentic experience.' Authentic experience is achieved by what Heidegger calls 'meditative thinking.' Heidegger says there are two types of thinking, each which is in its way legitimate and necessary: calculative thinking and meditative (recollective) thoughtfulness. Meditative thinking is different from the classical notion of Philosophy, proving or disproving a point by means of skilful conceptual maneuvering.[108] According to Heidegger, "Thinking begins only then, when we have realized that reason, glorified for centuries, is the most pertinacious opponent of thinking.[109] Authentic thinking is meditative thinking, a "listening to Being."

> What we need, in this time of planetary need, is not "philosophy" as an expression of the conceptual mastery over things, but thinking as meditative recollection and as a gesture of *Gelassenheit*, releasment, of being let into the letting-be in relation to Being, as releasement toward things and openness to mystery.[110]

From beings to Being there is no straight path but only a leap of thought from one dimension or mode to another.[111] Heidegger emphasizes that this meditative thinking remains a kind of thinking. The leap out of metaphysical thinking is not an abdication of thought, not a leap into the 'mystical', into some kind of intuitive, unmediated cognitive experience. The leap is not achieved by intuition in everyday experience. Heidegger rejects the idea of *Erlebnis*, which he considers irrational. Just because conceptual thinking is inadequate does not mean that one can lapse into irrationalism or into mysticism, "the mere counterpart of metaphysics."[112] The

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[107] J.L. Mehta: "Heidegger's Debts to Dilthey's Hermeneutics and Husserl's Phenomenology", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 49. Various ways of understanding transcendence will be examined in later chapters of this thesis.

[108] J.L. Mehta: "Philosophy, Philology and Empirical Knowledge", *Philosophy and Religion: Essays in Interpretation*, p. 95.

[109] Martin Heidegger: *What is Called Thinking?* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 15. Cited by J.L. Mehta: "World Civilization: The Possibility of Dialogue", *Philosophy and Religion: Essays in Interpretation*, p. 36.

[110] J.L. Mehta: "The Will to Interpret and India's Dreaming Spirit", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 184.

[111] J.L. Mehta: " Heidegger's Debt to Dilthey's Hermeneutics and Husserl's Phenomenology", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition,* p. 49.

[112] J.L. Mehta: " Heidegger and Vedanta", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 251. Mehta's own view is that the leap is not achieved by intuition in everyday experience, but by a special meditative

leap is a leap of thought, a transformation of the nature of thought itself where it surrenders its conceptuality, its will to grasp, and is content to let what is reveal itself, and to let Truth shine forth.

Although Heidegger continues to call it thinking, Mehta says that, from the viewpoint of representational thinking, the leap is a renunciation of thought itself.[113] Mehta suggests that this view of meditative thinking carries Heidegger beyond the limitation of his own thought into a region of "pure" thinking, the region of Being in *its* truth, unconditioned by the particular tradition from which one happens to leap into it.[114]

As already discussed, Abhishiktānanda speaks of the *advaitic* experience as "going beyond" our ideas, concepts, myths and archetypes. For him, this "going beyond" is a return to our original consciousness. But he also speaks of this experience as "transcending" the archetypes, which is suggestive of the Yogic Model.[115] The "return" to our original consciousness is a transcending. Abhishiktānanda contrasts this "going beyond" with the "stopping short" at an idea:

> Conceptual structure can never either contain or enclose the *true*, as westerners too often tend to think. Whoever stops short at ideas, misses their message.[116]

Abhishiktānanda himself was acutely aware of stopping short at an idea of the *advaitic* experience without attaining the experience itself. In 1953, he wrote,

> Perhaps last year I had more the *idea* of *advaita*, of *sanmātra* [pure being]–and the idea more than the *res* [the thing itself]?[117]

Abhishiktānanda tried to give up even his conception of *advaita.*[118] He was also concerned that his own ideas of *advaita* would be used by others for their intellectual

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experience. This is similar to Wilber's view of pre/trans. The immediate experience of meditation is not the same as the pre-conscious understanding.

113 J.L. Mehta: "The Saving Leap", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 90.

114 J.L. Mehta: "The Saving Leap", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 92.

115 *Diary*, p. 123 (5.9.55).

116 Preface, *Guru*, p. 8.

117 *Diary*, p. 66 (21.3.53), cited in *Letters*, p. 61. This quotation itself shows the influence of scholastic terminology ("*res")* in the formulation of his ideas.

118 *Diary*, p. 114 (3.8..55).

satisfaction, but without really listening to the ideas, and without any desire for conversion or awakening.[119] He emphasized that *advaita* should not be seen as an idea; the *advaitic* experience goes beyond all ideas:

> Advaita is not an idea. *It is*! The lightning flashes, the eye blinks, as says the Kena [Upanishad]. Then? You have either understood, or you have not understood…If you have not understood, too bad! says the same Upanishad. If you have understood, you keep quiet, says the Mundaka [Upanishad].[120]

Sometimes Abhishiktānanda follows this advice, and says that the *advaitic* experience is impossible to describe and that it can only be pointed to by silence:

> There is no thought about the mystery which is not already *nāmarūpa*. The experience at the original moment cannot be discerned except in an "Ah"! (cp. Kena Upanishad 4,4)[121]

In other places, he writes of the difficulty of expressing the experience, except in cultural terms:

> Of course I can stammer a few words. But that will never be more than some concepts, strictly dependent on my cultural, social, religious and mental environment, on all the previous development of my thought and my consciousness.[122]

At other times, Abhishiktānanda is very conceptual in his analysis of the *advaitic* experience. Of course, once the 'ineffable' has been expressed in concepts, those concepts may be analyzed. We may look to the textual and oral sources of these ideas, and how Abhishiktānanda may have adopted or changed these ideas. Of special importance here are the teachings of the two Hindu sages who most influenced Abhishiktānanda: Ramaṇa Maharshi and Gnānānanda.

Loy's comparative philosophy is sensitive to the problems of analyzing what is said to be unanalyzable. He acknowledges that those who claim to have had an *advaitic* experience generally claim that the experience is in some sense immediate, and not to be grasped conceptually.

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[119] *Letters*, p. 239 (OB 20.11.70).

[120] *Letters* p. 227 (RV, 8.3.70).

[121] *Diary*, p. 370 (2.2.73).

> But, according to the "nondualist systems" to be considered (…) philosophy cannot grasp the source from which it springs and so must yield to praxis: the intellectual attempt to grasp nonduality conceptually must give way to various meditative techniques which, it is claimed, promote the immediate experience of nonduality.[123]

Mehta, too refers to this paradox of how we can express the ineffable. He refers to the "teasing relation between the pregnant silence of the Buddha and the flood of discursive talk that followed it unremittingly across the centuries."[124] He asks, what is the relation between ineffability of experience and verbal articulation, between the way of the Muni and the way of the Rishi?

In the Yogic Model, the practice of meditation is essential to reaching the transcendent state. Wilber points out that this means that those who have not learned contemplation will not understand.[125] This view is offensive to those who hold another epistemology. But the fact that the transcendent reality can be reached only by meditation does not mean it is unverifiable. It is verified, although not in a positivist way, each time that someone becomes enlightened. Frits Staal has emphasized the importance of personal experimentation in investigating a mystical experience. Mystical experience must be studied directly and from within.[126] That is what Abhishiktānanda did in his life. His life was an experiment with the *advaitic* consciousness. We have Abhishiktānanda's testimony to review of this experiment. The way that his testimony will be explored is a kind of phenomenology.

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[122] *Diary*, p. 371 (2.2.73).

[123] *Nonduality*, p. 5.

[124] J.L. Mehta: "Sri Aurobindo: Life, Language and Yoga", *J.L. Mehta: J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 170.

[125] Ken Wilber: "Eye to Eye: Science and Transpersonal Psychology", in *Paths Beyond Ego: The Transpersonal Vision*, ed. Roger Walsh and Frances Vaughan (Tarcher, 1993), pp. 184ff.

[126] Frits Staal: *Exploring Mysticism* (University of California Press, 1975), p. 123.

C. Phenomenology

This thesis uses dialogal phenomenology[127] to attempt to 'unpack' Abhishiktānanda's descriptions of his experience. The method attempts to identify 'experiential expressions' and symbols that he uses to describe the experience. Once identified, these experiential expressions are amplified and further explicated. How does dialogal phenomenology differ from other kinds of phenomenology?

'Phenomenology' is a word that is often used to describe different methods of investigation in religious studies; frequently, the word is used without any investigation into or acknowledgement of the theoretical foundations of the method. Sometimes, the word is used to express some empirical investigation into the 'facts' of religious experience. But this does not recognize that phenomenology often has very different assumptions from empirical investigation. The loose use of the word 'phenomenology' also often ignores that there are several different kinds of phenomenology.[128]

For Husserl, phenomenology is related to 'intentionality'. Intentionality is the common characteristic of all 'directed' acts. Corresponding to our intentionality is the 'object' as the pole of all our conceivable intentions. Our consciousness is always consciousness of something. For Husserl, intentional knowing serves as the foundation to all others; the thing is first known as the object before it is appreciated, sought, or desired. Mehta says that Husserl failed to be critical and radical enough; he did not inquire into the mode of Being of consciousness.[129] Mehta rejects the whole idea of intentionality as "untenable, being based on a preconceived notion of a pure cognitive awareness standing over against a world of objective entities."[130]

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[127]A rather preliminary description of this method is given by Sunnia D. Kidd and James W. Kidd in their *Experiential Method: Qualitative Research in the Humanities using Metaphysics and Phenomenology* (New York: Peter Lang, 1990). The Kidds emphasize that this is less a method than it is a 'way' of dialogue.

[128] See Pierre Thévenaz*: What is Phenomenology?* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1962). The Kidds also review some different kinds of phenomenology at p. 71, ft. 63. Mehta also refers to Thévenaz in this connection. J.L. Mehta: *India and the West: The Problem of Understanding,* p. 36.

[129] J.L. Mehta: "Heidegger's Debts to Dilthey's Hermeneutics and Husserl's Phenomenology", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, 40.

[130] J.L. Mehta: "Heidegger's Debts to Dilthey's Hermeneutics and Husserl's Phenomenology", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, 42.

Existential phenomenology rejects Husserl's identification of Being with object-being. Being is more than what can be made into an object. Existentialists also reject the primacy of the act of knowing; experience is more than knowing. For existentialists, the subjective self remains the point of departure. We experience life before we begin to observe and/or investigate it.

Dialogal phenomenology differs from these other phenomenologies by (1) going beyond the merely subjective to the inter-subjective (2) including our presuppositions in relation to what is being investigated, (3) in its emphasis on an attentive "listening to Being", and (4) in its use of the method of amplification of themes that are identified in the investigation. These four differences are also ways in which this 'method' is compatible with Mehta's approach to comparative philosophy and with the Yogic Model of epistemology.[131]

Whereas existential phenomenology is based on one's subjectivity, dialogal phenomenology attempts to move beyond subjectivity into intersubjectivity. The Kidds speak of the transcendent as having both a vertical and a horizontal dimension. The horizontal transcendence is the move from one's own subjectivity to the being of others. This involves a view of a self that is connected both to others and to the world. Using Panikkar's words, this method assumes a self that "besides being myself is also shared by the other."[132]

Dialogal phenomenology acknowledges the necessity of including our assumptions. When we attempt to understand another person's description of an experience, there is no neutral phenomenological method that can be used to get at the essence of the experience that is being described. Every phenomenology brings with it certain assumptions. We do not have a pure description on which we can then add an interpretation. Nor did Abhishiktānanda have such a pure description available to him. As Heidegger says,

> In interpreting, we do not, so to speak, throw a 'signification' over some naked thing which is present-at-hand, we do not stick a value on it; but when something within-the-world is encountered as such, the thing in question already has an

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[131] The Kidds emphasize that it is more of a way than a method. It is not a method in the sense of a technique: (*op. cit.* p. 44). Radical phenomenology involves a critique of instrumentality and technique: p.62, ft. 24. Instrumentality and technique rely on what is observable, measurable, and repeatable. If it cannot be measured, the phenomenon does not exist; if it does not occur on demand it does not exist. But as James says, Truth as technically verified might miss the truth of truths. William James, *The Will to Believe*, (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1931), p. 21.

[132] R. Panikkar: *The Intrareligious Dialogue* (Paulist Press, 1978), p. 40.

> involvement which is disclosed in our understanding of the world, and this involvement is one which gets laid out by the interpretation.[133]

This acknowledgement of our assumptions differs from Husserl's phenomenology, where he sought an objective and neutral description of the object. According to Husserl, the investigator brackets his or her own presuppositions; he called this bracketing the *epoché*.[134] Dialogal phenomenology rejects this goal of an *epoché*.

The idea of 'listening to being' is a recurring thought in Heidegger; this idea is adopted by dialogal phenomenology. The phenomenon is that which shows itself in its being, and which we then can hear and see. Instead of Husserl's emphasis on intentionality, there is now an emphasis on attention. What is important is to pay attention to the phenomenon. In this attention, we return to our 'lived-world', the world of our original experience. This world of our original experience is the basis for our thinking.[135] There is an appearance of the phenomenon. There is also another kind of manifestation in the sense of *Erscheinung*: symbols. In showing themselves, symbols indicate or point to something that itself does not appear.[136]

Dialogal phenomenology is a way of allowing us to see and hear into the nature of things, and bringing them to light. Mehta speaks of this kind of phenomenology in relation to Heidegger's thought. Heidegger's method does not seek a proof, but ends in a 'seeing' or 'hearing' of the phenomenon, a bringing of the phenomenon to light.[137] Phenomenology (like the Yogic Model) is then something that must be practiced.[138]

There is no neutral phenomenological method that can be used to get at the essence of an experience that is being described. But we can try to achieve an ever-increasing approximation

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[133] Heidegger: *Being and Time*, tr. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1962), pp. 190-191.

[134] Panikkar explores several reasons why this *epoché* is inappropriate. See R. Panikkar: *The Intrareligious Dialogue* (Paulist Press, 1978), pp. 40-55.

[135] The Kidds refer here to William A. Luijpen, *Phenomenology and Humanism: A Primer in Existential Phenomenology* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1966), p. 60.

[136] Mehta: "Heidegger's Debt to Dilthey's Hermeneutics and Husserl's Phenomenology", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 62.

[137]J.L. Mehta: "Heidegger's Debts to Dilthey's Hermeneutics and Husserl's Phenomenology", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, pp. 44, 45.

[138] J.L. Mehta: "Heidegger's Debts to Dilthey's Hermeneutics and Husserl's Phenomenology", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 73.

of that which is being described by a circling around the description, by an amplification, an expansion of meaning in the development of an idea. According to dialogal phenomenology, we must first try to identify 'experiential expressions'. These are short expressions or single sentences that convey qualitative dimensions of how the person has experienced a given situation. The expressions are identifiable because of their emphasis by the subject. They stand out. They may include statements regarding feeling, belief and attitude, meaning and value. These experiential expressions are best seen when they are spontaneous expressions. This is why the *Diary* of Abhishiktānanda is so important to understanding his *advaitic* experience. It is more spontaneous than the works that he published only after extensive revision. Words used to describe the nature and quality of an experience also reveal a dimension of subjectivity, the 'who' of the experience. The investigator must ask, "How and what does this phenomenon mean for this who, this person? Why was it personally significant?" The investigator must look for consistency in expression, congruency or similarity to other expressions, and distinguishing differences from other expressions.

The next stage is to identify themes within the work.[139] An 'amplification' is made of these themes. In this amplification, we attempt to get as much detail as possible concerning the experience reported, so that the many sides of the descriptions are taken into account without reducing the experience to any one description.[140] We must try to stay with and not move away from the originality of the description. By attention, there is an attempt to remain open to possible meaning by staying with the wholeness, the liveliness and vitality of the experience rather than reducing meaning to *data* by use of analysis.

Mehta finds this kind of amplification in Heidegger. Heidegger does not infer, deduce or generalize. He offers no 'logical' arguments; he 'proves' nothing. It is not a logical demonstration but understanding (*Verstehen*).

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[139] Heidegger refers to 'Leitmotifs of meaning': "*Leitmotifs* of thinking gives voice to a bond that binds all thinking, providing that thinking submits to the call of what must be thought." *On Time and Being,* tr. JoanStambaugh, (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), p. 24, cited by the Kidds, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

[140] C.G. Jung also uses the word 'amplification' in reference to his analysis of dreams. In Jung's way of understanding a dream, there is a similar circling of ideas, identifying themes and then amplifying them. Another comparison is Chatterjee's 'elucidation' of structures of consciousness rather than a description of them. See Margaret Chatterjee, *The Language of Philosophy* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981), p. 131, cited by the Kidds, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

> Yet, through his analyses and explorations in depth, through the reconnoitering movement of his thought, going in circles around the matter in question, he brings into view coherent structures lying buried under the surface of our everyday experience as well as the presuppositions, the light of Being, involved in the way we interpret and understand this experience.[141]

In Heidegger's philosophizing, there is a similar amplification, a 'repeating' of an earlier analysis on higher levels[142] There is a 'pointing to' in this amplification. There is a circular movement between the authentic and back again to the 'everyday' mode of *Existenz* until a clear picture of the way the two modes are related emerges into view. There is a definite relation between the 'essence' of the object of the experience and the manner of its expression by the subject.

I will use this method of amplification to attempt to unpack Abhishiktānanda's self-understanding of his experience. The use of amplification means that I am not trying to fit Abhishiktānanda's ideas into a pre-existing mold, such as a particular type of Christian theology, or of Hindu theology. If Abhishiktānanda himself makes comparisons to theologies, these comparisons must be looked at. But the attempt must be made to understand Abhishiktānanda in his own terms. And in doing so, we must look not only at the concepts that he uses, but also at the symbols and metaphors, and to his more poetic descriptions.

D. Sources Investigated

Abhishiktānanda's own writings are the primary source to understand and assess his *advaitic* experience. Fortunately, he wrote a great deal. His works include numerous books, articles for periodicals (some under an assumed name), correspondence to friends, and his private diary. Most of these writings have been published, although in some cases only excerpts have been published. An archive of all of Abhishiktānanda's works is maintained at Vidyajyoti College in Delhi. In the spring of 2001, I was able to review the Abhishiktānanda archives at Vidyajyoti College. Fr. Gispert-Sauch was most helpful to me in allowing me access to these documents.

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[141] J.L. Mehta: "Heidegger's Debts to Dilthey's Hermeneutics and Husserl's Phenomenology", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 43.

After seeing the documents in the archives, I can now better appreciate the enormous work done by James Stuart in editing the *Letters*. Equally impressive is the work done by Raimon Panikkar and his collaborators Bettina Bäumer, James Stuart, Jacques Dupuis and N. Shanta in the translation and editing of Abhishiktānanda's *Diary*. It is hoped that the Abhishiktānanda Society[143] will in future make Abhishiktānanda's unpublished work available on microfiche.

In addition to Abhishiktānanda's own writings, there is a growing body of secondary literature about him and his ideas. An extensive bibliography of this literature was prepared by James Stuart, who edited the translation of Abhishiktānanda's letters. The Abhishiktānanda Society publishes a periodical, the *Bulletin of the Abhishiktānanda Society*, which appears on an irregular basis. It is presently edited by Dr. Bettina Bäumer, and provides details about Abhishiktānanda previously unpublished.

In Delhi, I was also able to meet with James Stuart. His recollections of Abhishiktānanda were primarily with respect to the translation and publishing of his books. I value his opinion that, despite what Abhishiktānanda's books may say, he was not an acosmic, but someone who was very down to earth.

I have also corresponded with Madame Odette Baumer-Despeigne, who knew Abhishiktānanda and whose correspondence with him is included in the *Letters*. I have also corresponded with Christian Hackbarth-Johnson, who is presently researching Abhishiktānanda's life and ideas. He has reviewed both the archives in Delhi as well as those sources which were available to Abhishiktānanda at the Abbey of Ste.-Anne de Kergonan, Brittany, and he has kindly provided me with some of the results of this research.

While in India I was also able to visit Abhishiktānanda's ashram Shantivanam at Tannirpalli, Ramaṇa's ashram at Tiruvannamalai, Gnānānanda's ashram Tapovanam at Tirukoilur, and Aurobindo's ashram in Pondicherry. I had earlier visited Aurobindo's ashram in

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142 J.L. Mehta: "Heidegger's Debts to Dilthey's Hermeneutics and Husserl's Phenomenology", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 43.

143 The Abhishiktānanda Society, 7 Court Lane, Delhi, India 110054.

1973. Seeing all these places provided concrete images and new insights into the meanings of Abhishiktānanda's writings.

I was impressed by the beauty of Shantivanam. There are beautiful gardens, a forest of palms, a banyan tree, an almond tree, and banana trees. The chapel has impressive images on its roof, including the figure of Christ seated as a yogi. The Mass in the chapel was chanted in Tamil, Sanskrit and English and included the waving of lights, and incense in the fashion initiated by Abhishiktānanda and Monchanin, and continued by their successor Bede Griffiths. The ashram was filled with visitors, including many young people. There is a *samādhi* (memorial) over the grave of Abhishiktānanda, whose body was moved there from Indore. I am most grateful for the assistance given me by Sr. Sarananda, who provided me with information concerning Monchanin.

At Ramanasramam we were welcomed by Sri V. S. Ramanan. Again, the grounds were beautiful. There were peacocks and monkeys. I was astonished to see so many devotees from so many different countries. In the dining hall, we sat on the floor facing each other in rows, and were served our meals on palm leaves. In the meditation hall the devotees either sat silently, or walked clockwise around the *samādhi* of Ramaṇa Maharhsi. Sometimes a *pūjā* was performed, and I was reminded of how Abhishiktānanda says how he found the chanting to be spell-binding, and allowed himself to be carried away by it. The presence of Ramaṇa could still be felt when I was there. We were also able to walk up Arunāchala and visit one of the caves where Ramaṇa and Abhishiktānanda meditated.

At Tapovanam, Swami Nityananda welcomed us most enthusiastically. We were able to see the *sīla* (image) of Gnānānanda, and participate in the *pūjā.* We participated in meditation in the meditation room there. I would recommend a visit to Tapovanam for those wanting to meditate. I was fortunate to meet Richard Allison, a devotee who had spent several years with Gnānānanda. He told me that Gnānānanda did not speak much English, so he learned mostly by example and silence. Mr. Allison had also met Abhishiktānanda once at Hardwar.

All of these impressions have helped to place Abhishiktānanda's writings in the context in which they were written.

III. Major Influences on Abhishiktānanda

Why did Abhishiktānanda seek the *advaitic* experience in the first place? And from where did he obtain the terminology that he used to describe the experience? There are many different sources that appear to have influenced Abhishiktānanda in this way. It is important to recognize that although Abhishiktānanda may have been influenced by someone in seeking the experience or in understanding the experience in a certain way, this does not necessarily mean that his experience was nothing but that person's ideas. If we use the Immediate Experience Model, the experience is primary and the ideas are expressions of the *advaitic* experience. If we find the influences of these expressions, we may be better able to understand them. If we use the Yogic Model, then it is important to see what ideas lead up to and are eventually transcended in the *advaitic* experience.

A. Books

Abhishiktānanda was undoubtedly influenced by his extensive reading. Several hundred books that Abhishiktānanda owned at the end of his life have been placed in the Vidyajyoti Library at Delhi.[1] The books show a wide range of reading. They include Sanskrit dictionaries and copies of the *Bhagavad Gita*, various editions of the *Upanishads* and the *Vedanta-Sutras*, writings by Shankara, Rāmānuja and various poet-saints, including the *Tiruvaçagam* (writings of a Tamil saint). The Buddhist *Dhammapada* is also in the list. Some modern Hindu writers that are included are Aurobindo, Dayananda Sarasvati, Gandhi, Radhakrishnan, Ramaṇa Maharshi, Swami Ramdas, and Swami Sivānanda. Western philosophers, theologians and indologists in the list include Aquinas, Augustine, Barth, Bonhoeffer, Bultmannn, Eliade, Gilson, Heidegger, Jaspers, Kierkegaard, Gabriel Marcel, Pascal, Rahner, Louis Renou, Rudolf Otto, Panikkar, Plato, Plotinus, van der Leeuw, von Balthazar, and Heinrich Zimmer. Some Western mystics in the list are Teilhard de Chardin, Eckhart, Hadewijch of Anvers, St. John of the Cross, Thomas Merton, Ruysbroeck, Tauler, Ste. Teresa of Avila, Simone Weil, some mystics of the Orthodox

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[1] Christian Hackbarth-Johnson has kindly provided me with a copy of this list of books. In addition to these books, Abhishiktānanda had other books at the ashram Shantivanam. Abhishiktānanda gave most of the books of the ashram to the Aikiya Alayam Ashram in Madras when he left Shantivanam in 1968.

church, and the books *The Cloud of Unknowing* and *the Way of a Pilgrim*. The only literature included in the list are several works by Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy. The *Diary* and *Letters* refer to many other books that Abhishiktānanda read.

Even during the time that he was living in caves on Arunāchala, Abhishiktānanda still read many books.[2] Other hermits found it hard to understand why he relied on books and reading. One of them asked him what the use was of all these books. "You open them, and you close them. What is that, compared with the book of the heart?"[3]

Panikkar was also critical of Abhishiktānanda's reading, although for a different reason. He comments that most of the books that Abhishiktānanda read were Western in their orientation, and that it was an "insignificant number of classical and modern writers in the Hindu tradition that he read and studied in Sanskrit."[4] However, Panikkar has stated that Abhishiktānanda's reading of the Upanishads was "excellent."[5]

The writings of Olivier Lacombe seem to be among Abhishiktānanda's main sources of information about Vedānta. Two of Lacombe's books are included on the list of books at his death. In *L'Absolu selon le Vedanta* Lacombe says that the study of Vedānta should not be a comparison of West and East "philosophemes"; one must first know both terms of the comparison. This advice to first know both traditions before any comparison is remarkably like the views that were later expressed by J.L. Mehta.[6] However, Lacombe takes the position that although Hindus may reach a high stage of mysticism, this level is completed or fulfilled by the Christian revelation.[7] In his early writings, Abhishiktānanda himself adopted such a fulfillment view of the relation between Christianity and Hinduism. But he later abandoned this view.

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[2] *Secret*, p. 34, ft. 6.

[3] *Letters*, p. 66 (L, Nov. 53). The same criticism was given in 1968 by another Swami at Rishikesh on Abhishiktānanda's way to Gangotri. *Diary* p. 300 (7.7.68). "…the uselessness and harm of reading except to remind oneself and to explain to others. Reading burdens the memory, does not help us realize the Self."

[4] Raimon Panikkar, Introduction to *Diary*, p. xx.

[5] Emmanuel Vattakuzhy: *Indian Christian Sannyāsa and Swami Abhishiktānanda* (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1981), p. 101.

[6] Olivier Lacombe: *L'Absolu selon le Vedanta* (Paris, 1937), p. 6. For Mehta's views, see. Chapter II of this thesis.

[7] Olivier Lacombe: "Orient et Occident", *Études Carmélitaines: Mystiques et Missionaires*, April/1931, vol. 16, p. 133-159. Abhishiktānanda almost certainly read this article, since, as will be shown, he was strongly influenced by a later article by Lacombe in the same journal.

Lacombe's book on Rāmānuja was also among Abhishiktānanda books.[8] But Abhishiktānanda mentions the ideas of Rāmānuja only infrequently in his writings.

In later chapters of this thesis, reference will be made to some of these books that Abhishiktānanda read and which appeared to influence him. The Appendix is devoted to outlining the influence of C.G. Jung. However, much of the influence on Abhishiktānanda was not by books but by individuals with whom he came in contact.

B. Jules Monchanin

One of the earliest influences on Abhishiktānanda in India was Fr. Jules Monchanin with whom he founded the ashram Shantivanam. It was from Monchanin that Abhishiktānanda learned the idea of the relative character of the Scriptures and Christian dogma.[9] Indeed, as we shall see, it was from Monchanin that Abhishiktānanda obtained many of his intellectual ideas.

Monchanin at one time thought it was essential to find a guru.[10] He had visited Ramaṇa Maharshi, and he and Abhishiktānanda together visited him again. Prior to Ramaṇa's death, Monchanin visited Ramaṇa again while Abhishiktānanda stayed behind at Shantivanam.

Monchanin died in October 1957. Abhishiktānanda gave the Memorial address, where he characterizes Monchanin:

> A soul contemplative both by nature and by grace, nourished on the Greek Fathers, the mystics of the West, and above all the mediaeval Rhinelanders, he was in all respects ready to penetrate that secret of contemplation which is at the root of all the most fundamental institutions of India, both philosophical and religious, that mystic centre of her being from which all her civilisation has sprung.[11]

From the text, it is clear that by "mediaeval Rhinelanders", Abhishiktānanda is referring to Ruysbroeck, Suso, Tauler, Eckhart and their contemporary Hadewijch of Anvers, as well as the authors of *the Mirror of Simple Souls* and *The Cloud of Unknowing*. It is also clear that Monchanin's interest in these mystics influenced Abhishiktānanda. In his Memorial address,

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[8] Olivier Lacombe: *La Doctrine moral et métaphysique de Ramanuja,* (Paris: Adrien Maisonneuve, 1938).

[9] *Diary*, p. 138, (12.1.56).

[10] Letters by Monchanin, cited in *Letters*, p. 88 (11.8.39 and 12.4.50).

Abhishiktānanda says that a familiarity with these mystics is "an irreplaceable preparation for a sound intellectual understanding of Indian religious thought and a comprehensive approach to Indian mystical experience." As shown by the list of books at his death, Abhishiktānanda read many of the writings of these Western mystics. He re-read these works as late as 1972. He refers to their writings as Christian *jñāna*.[12]

Although Abhishiktānanda found parallels in these writers to his own experience, he found their conceptual formulations of their experiences to be disconcerting and troubling:

> And really, how badly Eckhart's metaphysics confuse his marvellous mystical intuitions. It is the grace of the Upanishads that makes you see that everything is so simple![13]

Because it was Monchanin who first showed him the relativity of dogma, Abhishiktānanda was surprised at some of his later disagreements with Monchanin. Monchanin did not approve of Abhishiktānanda's travel to Rishikesh, "a place where *sādhus*, real or supposedly so (both kinds no doubt) devote themselves to delusive exercises, verging on a mirage."[14] Monchanin also discouraged Abhishiktānanda from visiting the ashram of Gnānānanda.[15] Monchanin could not understand the "mythical importance" that Abhishiktānanda gave to his experiences in the caves on the mountain of Arunāchala.[16] Monchanin also disapproved of some of Abhishiktānanda's writings. He thought that the chapter "Au dedans" ["Within"], a series of essays on the soul of the *sannyāsī* should not be published.[17]

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[11] *Swami Parama Arūbi Anāndam (Fr. J. Monchanin): A Memorial* (Saccidananda Ashram, 1959), pp. 7, 8.

[12] See for example *Diary*, p. 65 (16.3.53), *Letters*, p. 123 (FT, 26.10.59), and *Intériorité*, p. 154.

[13] *Letters*, p. 152. (L.20.3.63). See also *Letters*, p. 271 (MC, 13.6.72) for a similar comment regarding the language of St. John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila.

[14] Monchanin's letter, cited in *Letters*, p. 44 (20.12.50). This view influenced Abhishiktānanda for many years. In 1956, he raised the fear that his experience was a mirage. *Diary*, p. 180 (27.11.56).

[15] *Diary*, p. 142 (5.2.56).

[16] *Secret*, p. 50. Monchanin is there referred to by the name '*Purusha*'.

[17] *Letters*, p. 65 (L, 24.6.53). This became chapter 3 of *Guhāntara*. Abhishiktānanda commenced the writing of this book in 1952. It was not published because the censor in Paris found it "redolent of relativism, modernism, quietism, modalism and especially pantheism" (See *Diary*, p. 86). Parts of *Guhāntara* were posthumously published. See *Initiation*: "La grâce de l'Inde" and "Jusqu'à la Source, l'expérience de non-dualité", pp. 41-64. Some other chapters were published in *Intériorité*: "Cheminements intérieurs", "Ehieh asher ehieh" and "Épiphanie de Dieu", pp. 41-117.

Monchanin often reacted in a way contrary to Abhishiktānanda. Monchanin wrote that he felt himself to be more Greek than Hindu:

> I react in a contrary direction; never have I felt myself intellectually more *Christian* and also, I must say, more G*reek*. I experience a growing horror at the forms of muddled thinking in this 'beyond thought' which most often proves to be only a 'falling short of thought, in which everything gets drowned.[18]

Monchanin feared that *advaita*, like *yoga*, was "an abyss":

> He who immerses himself in it with a feeling that he has lost his balance (vertigo) cannot know what he will find at the bottom. I fear that it may be *himself* rather than the living trinitarian God. [19]

Monchanin's fear of this type of experience probably derived from his study of the Rhineland mystics. Ruysbroeck in particular criticized a false mysticism where one strips oneself of all images and activity and sinks down into oneself. Then one is "bare and imageless in his senses", a "bare vacancy". This false repose demands no exercise of virtue, and no tension of the will. Such a rest is nothing other than "an idleness, into which the man has fallen, and in which he forgets himself and God and all things in all that has to do with activity." In this false experience, a person "clings to himself in his rest rather than being united with God."[20]

Abhishiktānanda was aware of Monchanin's preference for Greek thought. He writes that Monchanin preferred to give up Vedanta for Greek rationalism.[21] He believed that because of this Greek framework, Monchanin was unable to see the depths of Hindu thought:

> But I think he [Monchanin] is too 'Greek' to go to the depths. India presses relentlessly beyond concepts, beyond the '*manas'* [mind]; how will the Greek,

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[18] Monchanin's letter, cited in *Letters* p. 87 (17.12.55). Only three days previously Monchanin had written to Abbé Duperray concerning his doubts about Abhishiktānanda's *Guhāntara*.

[19] Undated note by Monchanin, cited in *Letters*, p. 87. This appears to have influenced Abhishiktānanda who writes in his *Diary*, p. 74 (25.9.53): "Supposing in *advaita* I was only finding myself and not God?" Abhishiktānanda also refers to "the vertigo of Being." See *Diary*, p. 167 (21.11.56).

[20]John of Ruysbroeck: *The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage, The Sparkling Stone, The Book of Supreme Truth*, tr. C.A. Wynschenk Dom, ed. Evelyn Underhill (Kessinger, 1992; this book has also been published online at http://www.ccel.org/r/ruysbroeck/adornment/adornment.htm). See *The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage*, c. 66-67. See also the discussion of these warnings by Ruysbroeck by P. Nicolas de Jésus-Marie, "Éclaircissments sur les termes et les propositions de théologie mystique de Saint Jean de la Croix". *Etudes Carmélitaines: Mystiques et Missionnaires*, 1911, vol. 1 pp. 23ff. We know that Abhishiktānanda read this journal; perhaps Monchanin did, too.

[21] *Letters*, p. 241 (OB 23.12.70). This seems to contradict the statement in Abhishiktānanda's Memorial Address that Monchanin was fully prepared to penetrate the Indian secrets.

> even if a follower of Plotinus, ever make the sacrifice of his '*nous*' [mind]? and yet, neither the Self, nor therefore India, will ever be reached through concepts.[22]

But as we will see, despite his disagreements with Monchanin, Abhishiktānanda also shared many ideas with Monchanin, and sometimes even revised his ideas in response to Monchanin's criticism.

C. Ramaṇa Maharshi

1. Who was Ramaṇa Maharshi?

Ramaṇa Maharshi was a Hindu sage of *advaita*. He was probably the most important influence on Abhishiktānanda. Ramaṇa was born in 1879 in Tiruchuli, Tamil Nadu (South India). He was named Venkatarāman Ayyār; this was later abbreviated to Ramaṇa. When he was 12, his father died and he moved to his uncle's house in Madurai. He attended a Christian mission school, a fact that is important because he later drew parallels between Hindu and Christian thought. For example, he said that the whole of Vedānta is contained in the two Biblical statements "I am that I AM" and "Be still and know that I am God."[23]

As a young boy, Ramaṇa had a profound experience as a result of an enactment of death by himself. He had a sudden, violent fear of death. He lay down and imitated a corpse stretched out stiff, held his breath and kept his lips tightly closed so that no sound could escape. He realized that, even if his body died, his self would survive. He felt that he became absorbed in this self or 'I'; this feeling never left him after that.[24] It is believed that Ramaṇa was fully enlightened in this experience, without instruction from any *guru* or teacher. A few months after this experience, Ramaṇa secretly left his home and travelled alone to the temple town of

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[22] *Letters,* p. 72 (L, 17.6.54).

[23] *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi* (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramanasramam, 1994, first published 1955), p. 307. There are many other references to these Biblical statements by Ramaṇa. On p. 102 of the same book, he says that the Biblical statement "I AM THAT I AM" is the best definition of God, and is more direct than the *mahavakyas* like *Brahmaivaham*, *Aham Brahmasmi* and *Soham*. "The Absolute Being is *what* is. It is the Self. It is God. Knowing the Self, God is known. In fact God is none other than the Self."

[24] Arthur Osborne: *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge* (Samuel Weiser, 1997, first published 1970).

Tiruvanammalai, because a relative had told him about the sacred mountain Arunāchala which is located there.[25]

For about six months Ramaṇa lived in the temple in a trance, maintaining almost complete silence and seemingly oblivious to his physical discomfort. After that, he lived in the temple grounds, other nearby shrines, and in a nearby orchard. He continued to ignore his physical body, and had to be looked after by others. One of his devoted followers was Paḷanisvāmī, who stayed with him for 21 years. Ramaṇa moved from this orchard to a cave on Arunāchala. This practice of meditating in caves on Arunāchala was a practice that Abhishiktānanda was later to emulate. Ramaṇa lived in caves on Arunāchala for 23 years, until December 1922 after the death of his mother.[26] It was after this time that the ashram really was formed around Ramaṇa.

In 1912, while still living in the caves, Ramaṇa had a real near-death experience. While he was walking back to his cave, a sudden weakness overcame him. He said that the landscape in front of him gradually was shut out, as if a curtain was being drawn across his vision. Darkness and faintness came over him three times. He says that a bright white curtain completely shut off his vision, his head was swimming and his breathing stopped. His skin turned blue. His companion held him in his arms and began to lament his death. Ramaṇa says he could feel the clasp of his companion and hear his words. He saw the discoloration of his own skin and felt the stoppage of his circulation and breathing, and the increased chilliness of his body's extremities. He says this condition lasted for ten to fifteen minutes. Then a shock passed through his body with enormous force. Circulation and breathing revived, and he perspired from every pore. He opened his eyes and got up and said, "Let's go." Ramaṇa said that he did not bring on this fit on purpose, but that it was one of the fits he got occasionally, and that this one was more serious.[27]

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[25] He had not realized that Arunāchala was a real place until a relative mentioned that he had come from there, and that it was located at Tiruvanammalai.

[26] His mother had joined him in 1916; his younger brother came soon after, and was to become the head of the ashram at the base of Arunāchala. At the time of the mother's death in 1922, there was only one thatched shed to be used by the ashram. Ramaṇa's mother was buried (burial being reserved for saints), not cremated, and Ramaṇa wanted to be near her tomb.

[27] Arthur Osborne: *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge*, p. 60. Page 14 of the same book relates that as a boy he had once slept so soundly that no amount of beating could wake him up. See also *Saccidānanda*, p. 21.

Ramaṇa said that his enlightenment was not based on Scripture or on the study of other works. At the time of his enlightenment at his home in Madurai, he had not even heard of '*Brahman'* or '*samsāra*'. The only books he had read were the Bible, the *Periapuranam* [stories of 63 Tamil saints] and bits of the *Tayumanavar* [hymns of the saint Tayumanavar (1706 - 1744).[28] After his enlightenment, he read other books, and found that they "were analysing and naming what I had felt intuitively without analysis or name."[29] It is said that Ramaṇa's experience was therefore not due to these books, but that it was an immediate experience. It seems certain that he had not engaged in any yoga or other spiritual disciplines prior to his enlightenment.

But was Ramaṇa influenced to seek the experience by the few books that he had read before his experience? Osborne says that prior to his enlightenment, Ramaṇa was inspired to emulate the saints when he read the *Periapuranam*:

> [Ramaṇa] was overwhelmed with ecstatic wonder that such faith, such love, such divine fervour was possible, that there had been such beauty in human life. The tales of renunciation leading to Divine Union inspired him with awe and emulation.[30]

Even if Ramaṇa's experience was not due to books he had read, his teachings were very much influenced by these books. Admittedly, to analyze his teachings on the basis of the books which he studied is very much a Western analytical approach to his biography. His devotees, following a traditional hagiographical approach to his life say that there was no development or change in his teachings.[31] That view would seem to imply that at the time of his enlightenment he had instant conceptual knowledge as well. Whether or not he was influenced by these books, it is clear that Ramaṇa used ideas in the books he read in order to explain his experience to his disciples. For example, when he was staying in the temple grounds and orchard, Paḷanisvāmī

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[28] *The Teachings of Ramana Maharshi*, ed. Arthur Osborne (Samuel Weiser, 1972, first published 1962), p. 11. It is however possible that he was influenced to seek this state by the Bible's "Be still and know that I am God." See also the discussion on the *Tayumanavar, infra.*

[29] Cited by Osborne, *The Teachings of Ramana Maharshi* (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1978), p. 11.

[30] Arthur Osborne: *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge*, p. 17.

[31] Osborne makes this statement in his Preface to *The Collected Works of Ramaṇa Maharshi*, ed. by Arthur Osborne, (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1997). p. 11: "There was no change or development in his philosophy during the half century and more of his teaching. There could be none, since he had not worked out any philosophy but merely recognized the expositions of transcendental Truth in theory, myth, and symbol when he read them."

would bring him books from the library and read them to Ramaṇa. Ramaṇa had a prodigious memory, and he would then summarize the works for Paḷanisvāmī. These books appear to have included the *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha.*[32] Later, when Ramaṇa was living in one of the caves, he continued to read books from the library, and also Sanskrit books belonging to another Swami living nearby. In 1899, while he was living in the first cave *Virupaksha*, someone brought him a copy of the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, a work that is attributed to Shankara. Ramaṇa read it and made a Tamil prose translation of it.[33]

This reading of other works occurred prior to his own writings, and many years before he was called Ramaṇa Maharshi. That event did not occur until 1907, when Ganapati Sastri visited the Swami, as he then was known, in his cave. Ganapati Sastri (also called Ganapati Muni) had visited many sacred places in India, and had learned to repeat *mantras* and to perform *tapas* (asceticism). He was not satisfied, and so he asked Ramaṇa what *tapas* was. Ramaṇa replied that if one observes the source where the notion 'I' arises, and the source where the *mantra* is produced, and if the mind is absorbed into that source, that is *tapas*. Sastri was overjoyed and declared that the Swami must thereafter be known as *Bhagavan Sri Ramaṇa*, and as the *Maharshi* (the Great Rishi). He referred to Ramaṇa as a manifestation of God. *Bhagavan* means 'the Divine'. Sastri wrote a book in Sanskrit in praise of Ramaṇa that he called the *Ramaṇa Gita.*[34]

But the instruction that Sastri received from Ramaṇa came more than seven years following Ramaṇa's reading of works such as the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* and the *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha*. As will be shown later in this chapter, Ramaṇa's ideas are derived from these works.

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[32] Mahadevan mentions that a work called the *Vāsiṣṭham* was brought to him by Paḷanisvāmī. Mahadevan mentions the work but does not relate it to Ramaṇa's ideas. See T.M.P. Mahadevan: *Ramana Maharshi: The Sage of Aruṇācala* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1977), pp. 37, 38.

[33] An English translation is included in *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, pp. 124-173.

[34] Ganapati Muni: *Ramana Gita: Dialogues with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, tr. A.R. Natarajan (Bangalore: Ramana Maharshi Centre for Learning, 1994).

Ramaṇa himself wrote very little. These works have been collected and edited by his disciple Arthur Osborne. This includes his translations of other works.[35] Most of the books that set out Ramaṇa's ideas are records of conversations with him, and letters written from disciples at the ashram at Tiruvannamalai.

2. Teachings of Ramaṇa Maharshi

a) Self-Enquiry

Ramaṇa's primary teaching was the teaching of the quest for the self. He called this the *ātma-vicāraṇa*, the enquiry into the *ātman* or Self. Between 1900 and 1902, while he was maintaining silence in Virupaksha cave, he wrote out instructions for the disciple Gambhīram Seshayyar. After Seshayyar's death, these were arranged and published as a book under the title *Self-Enquiry*. The book "*Who am I?"* derives from replies given during the same period to another disciple, Sivaprakasam Pillai. Both works are contained in *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi.*[36]

Ramaṇa centered all his spiritual guidance and teaching on this simple question: "Who (am) I?" He said that this very question "Who am I?" is itself the revelation of *Brahman*. This method of self-enquiry is the straight, short and direct path to realization.[37] This method of self-enquiry is superior to *bhakti* (devotion) as well as to yoga.[38]

Self-enquiry is the quest and pursuit of the true Self within the self. The cause of bondage is our mistaking the body or the not-I for the Self. One must seek the actor who is behind the acting, the thinker behind the thought, the one who wills behind the act of willing. The enquiry focuses inward, for the Self is found in the "cave of the heart." This Self remains

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[35] Ramaṇa Maharshi: *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, ed. Arthur Osborne (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1997). Ramaṇa's translations into Tamil have been translated again into English. In addition to the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* it includes some brief translations from the *Agamas.*

[36]Osborne says that *Self-Enquiry* was written in 1901. But it was only many years later that it was published by the ashram as *Vichara-sangraham*, which means 'A Compendium of Self-Enquiry.' The English translation was not published until 1937. Who *am I?* was first published in 1936.

[37] Paul Brunton and Munagala Venkataramiah: *Conscious Immortality: Conversations with Sri Ramana Maharshi* (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramanasramam, 1996, first published 1984), p. 45.

the same through all our states of consciousness: waking, sleeping, dreaming, and the fourth state, *turīya*, which is achieved in the enquiry. The goal is to attain the natural state (*sahaja samādhi*), the deepest, innate truth of our nature. This state is lived with full awareness only when one has experienced the Self. Ramaṇa refers to this as the "I-I". This "I-I" is not ego or individuality. It is a limitless expanse of consciousness. To know the Self we must destroy the ego. When the ego vanishes, Reality will shine forth of itself.[39] If we find out who we really are, enlightenment or realization will inevitably follow.

This realization of the Self is by "direct and immediate experience". It is an "Intuitive Knowledge of the Heart".[40] The Self is self-luminous because it is self-evident and does not depend on an external knowledge to be known.[41]

The realization is beyond expression; words can only point to it; one knows *samādhi* only when one is in *samādhi*.[42] This experience is contrasted with knowledge that depends on subject and object.[43] Mere book learning is of no use. One should follow a *guru* who knows *Brahman*. Practical application is needed, not theoretical knowledge. "After Realization, all intellectual loads are useless burdens and are to be thrown overboard."[44]

b) The *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*

Ramaṇa translated the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* into Tamil in 1899, before he gave the instructions that were later published as *Self-Enquiry*. What has not been sufficiently recognized is that the teachings contained in *Self-Enquiry* are largely derived from the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*. *Self-Enquiry* makes extensive use of the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, and explicitly refers to it in places. Even the basic idea of self-enquiry or *vichāra* appears to derive from the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*. The

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[38] S.S. Cohen: *Reflections on Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi* (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramanasramam, 1990, first published 1959), pp. 133.

[39] S.S. Cohen: *Reflections on Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, p. 92. See also *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, pp. 53, 185, 222.

[40] "Self-Enquiry", T*he Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, pp. 25, 29.

[41] S.S. Cohen: *Reflections on Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, p. 86.*

[42] S.S. Cohen: *Reflections on Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, p. 152.

[43] *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, p. 23.

[44] *The Teachings of Ramana Maharshi*, p. 13.

word *vichāra* is used there several times to refer to an inquiry into the reality of one's own true nature. For example, Verse 15 uses *vichāra* in the sense that to know one's own nature one should practice meditation on this subject. The same verse stresses the necessity of first finding a guru who has true knowledge of Brahman. The *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* also stresses other doctrines used by Ramaṇa: the necessity to get rid of the delusions created by one's mind, the four states of consciousness, the self-luminous Self, *śakti* as the power of God, and the need for direct experience in the cave of the Heart. Verse 62, for example, says

> An illness is not cured just by pronouncing the name of the medicine without drinking it, and you will not be liberated by just pronouncing the word God without direct experience. [*anubhava*].[45]

In his translation of the Vivekacūḍāmaṇi Ramaṇa emphasized this necessity of direct experience. True liberation can be achieved by Self-enquiry or *vichāra*, and not by book learning.[46] The Self shines as ever-present, direct experience within the heart.[47] Or, as Ramaṇa translates it,

> This supreme Self is self-effulgent with manifold powers (shakti), incapable of being known by anyone, and yet is experienced by everyone as the "I-I" in the heart.[48]

Liberation cannot be attained through yoga, ritual or even by study of the scriptures. Even knowledge of the *mahavakyas* (great sayings) like "I am Brahman" will not remove bondage without direct experience. Obtaining the experience is like finding a treasure trove. It is not good enough to hear about the treasure. One must actually dig for it. One can be liberated in this life, as a jīvanmukta.

Authorship of the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* is traditionally ascribed to Shankara. Some Western scholars have questioned this. For example, Halbfass does not believe that the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*

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[45] *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi The Crest Jewel of Wisdom*, tr. John H. Richards. Online version at file:///Macintosh%20HD/Thesis/Sacred%20Texts/VIVEKACHUDAMANI%202. See also *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi of Śrī Śaṇkarācārya*, tr. Swami Madhavananda, 9th ed. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1974).

[46] *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, p. 125.

[47] *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, p. 139.

[48] *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, p. 170.

was written by Shankara.[49] The main reason that some scholars question its authenticity is that it adopts a theory of three truth values or levels of reality: the existent, the nonexistent, and that which is anirvacanīya or indeterminable as either real or unreal.[50] Paul Hacker however is one scholar who believed that the work is an authentic writing by Shankara; he has written about the use of this word *anirvacanīya*.[51] Initially, the word *anirvacan*īya was used in cosmology. The *Ṛg Veda* (10,129) uses the word when it says that prior to the origin of the world there "was at that time neither being nor nonbeing." Later the word was used to refer to the 'Reality' that is reached in the *advaitic* experience. This experience transcends all experience and is best described in negative terms. Both being and non-being are known empirically. But the transcendent *advaitic* experience goes beyond empirical knowledge; it is therefore described as "neither being nor nonbeing." Whether or not Shankara adopted this view of a third level of reality is debated. But it should be noted that even Shankara's disciple Sureśvara speaks of the self as "that which is above being and nonbeing". But later disciples of Shankara used the term *anirvacanīya* in connection with the doctrine of illusion, and it came to mean 'not truly existing." This represents quite a change of meaning of the word. Instead of a transcendent experience of a third level of reality, it refers to illusion. At the time of this change in the meaning of *anirvacanīya*, Vedānta became highly intellectualized and logicized; mysticism was confined within the bounds of logic.

It is precisely on this point–a third level of reality–that Ramaṇa relies on the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi.* He says that the doctrine of *māyā* is often misunderstood, and that Shankara did not deny the reality of the world. He only denied the world's reality when it is considered apart from *Brahman*:

> Shankara has been criticized for his philosophy of *māyā* (illusion) without understanding his meaning. He made three statements: that Brahman is real, that the universe is unreal, and that Brahman is the universe. He did not stop with the

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[49] Wilhelm Halbfass: *India and Europe*, pp. 384, 392. Halbfass says that the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* gives more significance to personal emotions and visions than is seen in other writings that he recognizes as written by Shankara. In other words, it emphasizes personal experience (*anubhava*) in the sense of *Erlebnis*.

[50] Karl H. Potter, ed.: *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies: Advaita Vedānta up to Śaṃkara and His Pupils* (Princeton, 1981), p. 335.

[51] Paul Hacker "The Theory of Degrees of Reality in Advaita Vedanta", *Philology and Confrontation: Paul Hacker on Traditional and Modern Vedanta*, ed. Wilhelm Halbfass (State University of New York, 1995), pp. 137-152.

> second. The third statement explains the first two; it signifies that when the Universe is perceived apart from Brahman, that perception is false and illusory. What it amounts to is that phenomena are real when experienced as the Self and illusory when seen apart from the self.[52]

Ramaṇa's reference to the three statements of Shankara refers to the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi.* In his prose translation of this work, Ramaṇa summarizes the teaching in three statements. He says that the first statement, that *Brahman* (alone) is real, is the standpoint of reason. The second, that the universe is unreal (illusion) is from the standpoint of non-existence. The third, that *Brahman* is the universe, is the standpoint of absolute dissolution. In this third viewpoint, "all that seems separate from me is myself." It is recommended as the most important viewpoint for Realization:

> Although all three of these viewpoints are aids to Realization, the third, in which one conceives everything as one's own Self, is the most powerful. Therefore, knowing the impartible Self to be one's own Self, by one's own experience, one must abide in one's own true nature, beyond any mental form. What more is there to say? The whole world and all individuals are really Brahman, and abidance as that impartible Brahman is itself Deliverance.[53]

Ramaṇa's translation is very free, often transposing paragraphs from the original. It has no verse divisions. Other translations of the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* do not enumerate these three different viewpoints. But they do support the teaching that the universe is nothing but *Brahman*:

> Verse 478. The verdict of all discussions on the Vedānta is that the *Jīva* and the whole universe are nothing but *Brahman*, and that liberation means abiding in *Brahman*, the indivisible Entity.
>
> Verse 521. The universe is an unbroken series of perceptions of *Brahman*; hence it is in all respects nothing but *Brahman*.[54]

Ramaṇa emphasizes this teaching that the universe is *Brahman*:

> The Vedantins do not say that the world is unreal. That is a misunderstanding. If they did, what would be the meaning of the Vedantic text: "All this is Brahman"? They only mean that the world is unreal as the world but real as Self. If you regard world as non-self, it is not real. Everything, whether you call it illusion

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[52] *The Teachings of Ramana Maharshi*, p. 16.

[53] *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, p. 165.

[54] *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, tr. Swami Madhavananda , 9th ed., (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1974).

(*Maya*) or Divine Play (*Lila*) or Energy (*Shakti*) must be within the Self and not apart from it.[55]

Ramaṇa's emphasis on seeing *Brahman* in all things may differentiate his teachings from that of other *advaitins*, and from Shankara, especially if the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* is not by Shankara. However, as will be discussed in more detail, Ramaṇa is not consistent in this emphasis on the reality of the world. In other recorded sayings and writings, he takes the view that the world has no reality. In this more monistic view, the emphasis is not on seeing *Brahman* in all things. The emphasis is rather on the *jñāni* or realized person realizing one's acosmic nature beyond space and time. This inconsistency in Ramaṇa is also an inconsistency that remained with Abhishiktānanda all his life. On the one hand he wanted to participate in the world, enjoying it as a manifestation of *śakti*On the other hand, he wanted to retreat in solitude as an acosmic monk or *sannyāsī.*

c) The *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha*

Another influence on Ramaṇa's teaching is the *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha*, which he read while living in the caves of Arunāchala. This work was known at least as early as 13th century CE, but may date from as early as the 6th or 7th centuries. For example, Olivier Lacombe dates it in the interval between Gaudapāda and Shankara.[56] It is attributed to Valmiki, the author of the *Rāmāyana*. Western scholars say that the work is syncretic, with borrowings from Yoga, *Sāmkhya*, *Śaiva* Siddhanta and Mahāyāna Buddhism.[57] The work tells how Vāṣiṣṭha, one of the primal sages, gives instruction to Rāma. Rāma becomes enlightened, and returns to rule his kingdom. This is an example of a *jīvanmukta* (one who is liberated in this life). Such a person can lead an active life without incurring any further bondage or *karma* from one's actions.

It is clear that, like the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, the *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha* is a source for Ramaṇa's teaching of self-enquiry. According to the *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha*, liberation is achieved only by the conquest of the mind by self-enquiry, and specifically the question "Who am I?":

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[55] *The Teachings of Ramana Maharshi*, p. 19.

[56] Olivier Lacombe: *L'Absolu selon le Vedanta*, p. 14.

[57] See Christopher Chapple, Introduction to *The Concise Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha*, tr. Swami Venkatesananda (State University of New York, 1984), p. xii. Quotations are from this edition of the work.

> What is inquiry? To inquire thus: "Who am I? How has this evil of *saṃsāra* (repetitive history) come into being?" is true inquiry–knowledge of truth arises from such inquiry. (II. 34)

Not everyone enquires into the truth of the self. But it is this self alone that is to be sought, adored and meditated upon (III, 194). By this enquiry of self-knowledge, one obtains infinite consciousness. There is no other way of liberation from bondage (III, 229).

There is no liberation as long as one clings to the reality of 'you' and 'I'. The enquiry is to be one of direct observation (III, 107). We are warned against taking our stand on concepts and percepts of the mind (III, 211). We are to rely rather on pure experience (III, 234). Immediate experience is described: "whatever vision arises within oneself, that is immediately experienced. Consciousness (as subject) itself becomes, as it were, the object of knowledge (III, 62). You cannot merely verbally deny a dual notion of existence. Such denial itself becomes a further distraction (III, 39). We are to become conscious of the self in all states of awareness.

Like the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, the *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha* also speaks of the power or energy (*śakti*) of infinite consciousness (III, 73). This *śakti* brings into manifestation and sustains the infinite variety of beings, from the Creator to the blade of grass (III, 193). It is always dynamic and active. This supports the doctrine that the world has some reality. The *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha* specifically refers to the world as an object in a mirror which is neither real nor unreal (III, 230). Two attitudes are conducive to liberation. One is that "I am the transcendental self." The other is that "I am all and everything" (III, 234).

Ramaṇa frequently refers to the *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha* and he even incorporates six couplets from it in his *Supplement to Forty Verses* (verses 21 to 27).[58] He also refers to the *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha* in *Self-Enquiry*—in support of his view that we should not search for the Self outside ourselves. It constantly shines as "I-I' within the Heart.[59]

This thesis looks at Abhishiktānanda's non-monistic interpretation of *advaita*. The *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha* lends support to this view. It says that when the mind drops the perception of duality there is neither duality nor unity (III, 75). Unity is seen only in opposition to duality. We are to

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[58] *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, p. 80.

[59] *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, p. 27.

be freed from the conditions known as duality and non-duality (III, 209). The all-pervading consciousness is not an object of knowledge; it is beyond the concepts of unity and diversity. It is that other than which nothing else is (III, 214).

It is obvious that the *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha* influenced Ramaṇa. Ramaṇa in turn influenced Abhishiktānanda. It is thus very likely that Abhishiktānanda was indirectly influenced by the *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha.*

d) The *Ribhu Gita*

Ramaṇa refers to the *Ribhu Gita* many times. It is an extract from a much longer epic, the *Sivarahasya.* It tells of the experience of nonduality by the sage known as Ribhu. The focus of the text is on the Self. In order to achieve bliss, one must discard the mind. There is nothing that is not-self (1:11). Verse 24 says that if there is no "you", there is no "I". The *Ribhu Gita* refers to the heart-space within all beings (1:59). It is also significant in its view of nonduality as beyond mere unity:

> 26. If there is duality, there is (a concept of) nonduality; in the absence of duality, there is no (concept of) nonduality either. If there is something to be "seen," a seer is also there; in the absence of anything to see, there is no seer at all either.[60]

This would also appear to be an indirect source for Abhishiktānanda's view of *advaita* as non-monistic.

e) The *Tripura Rahasya*

One of the publications still for sale at Ramaṇa's ashram is the *Tripura Rahasya.* Its English translation contains the subtitle: "The Mystery Beyond the Trinity."[61] It is unclear who chose this title for the work. It may have been the English disciple of Ramaṇa, Major Chadwick. Chadwick wrote the Foreword to the book. The *Tripura Rahasya* is a *tantric* work. It refers to the Supreme Goddess by various names. She is called Tripura, because Her Body consists of

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[60] *Ribhu Gita*, tr. Dr. H. Ramamoorthy, (Society for Abidance in Truth, 1994).

[61] *Tripura Rahasya: The Mystery Beyond the Trinity*, tr. Swami Sri Ramanananda Saraswathi (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramanasramam, 1989). It is attributed to Dattatreya, the *guru* of *Patañjali.*

three *śaktis* (Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva).[62] Chadwick says that Ramaṇa considered this as one of the greatest works of *advaita* and often quoted from it. Ramaṇa regretted that it was not available in English.

According to this work, the Pure Self sometimes unfolds itself as the cosmos, and at other times withdraws Itself and remains unmanifest. Therefore Cosmos and the Self are only the same, but different modes of the one Reality which is Consciousness.[63] The Cosmos is therefore not unreal. It is real in the same way that an image in a mirror is real; the Cosmos is a real image of the Self. This book was important for Ramaṇa. It helps to explain his view that the world is real, although only insofar as it is dependent on *Brahman.* And yet, as we will see, Ramaṇa often denies any reality to the multiplicity of the world.[64]

The *Tripura Rahasya* also emphasizes the importance of direct experience. It says,

> Second-hand knowledge of the Self gathered from books or *gurus* can never emancipate a man until its truth is rightly investigated and applied to himself; direct Realisation alone will do that. Therefore, follow my advice and realise yourself, turning the mind inward.[65]

f) The *Tayumanavar*

As already mentioned, Ramaṇa had read parts of the *Tayumanavar* before his enlightenment. It is unclear what parts of the *Tayumanavar* Ramaṇa had read as a boy. But his reading of the *Tayumanavar* could have induced him to seek a trance state. The *Tayumanavar* says,

> When I think, I will have to shuffle this body
> I swoon in fear, my heart trembling
> Long, long indeed is the distance between

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[62] See Gopinath Kaviraj: "The Philosophy of Tripura Tantra". Online at http://www.hubcom.com/magee/tantra/philtan.htm

[63] *Tripura Rahasya* Chapter XI, verse 85 says, "That which shines as 'Is' is Her Majesty the Absolute Consciousness. Thus the universe is only the *Self–the One* and one only."

[64] "Cheminements Intérieurs", *Intériorité*, p. 58: Abhishiktānanda says that Ramana often says that it is only the *non-jñāni* who see a multiplicity of *jñāni.*

[65] *Tripura Rahasya* 18: 89,90.

The blissful state of Transcendent Silentness
And this ignorant one.[66]

Later in life Ramaṇa recited portions of the hymns in the *Tayumanavar*. He used to quote the following from the *Tayumanavar*: "When overpowered by the wide Expanse which is without beginning, end or middle, there is the realization of non-dual bliss."[67]

Of all the stanza's in the *Tayumanavar*, Ramaṇa preferred the one that says, "Ego disappearing another 'I-I' spontaneously manifests in full glory." This manifested state is called *mouna*. The *Tayumanavar* defines *mouna* (silence) as "that state which spontaneously manifests after the annihilation of the ego."[68] This is an obvious source for Ramaṇa's teaching of self-enquiry.

The eternal Being is that state where you have disappeared. You are eternal and also still. This cannot just be done by the mind telling us to be still. He quotes the *Tayumanavar* as saying that silence is the ocean in which all the rivers of all the religions discharge themselves.[69] Ramaṇa explains this doctrine of the *Tayumanavar* with the story of someone who is told that the medicine he is given will work if only he doesn't think of a monkey. Naturally, he will always think of the monkey. Conscious, deliberate effort is necessary to reach the state of stillness.[70] . It is the state that is free from thoughts.[71]

g) Comparison to Shankara

Ramaṇa is generally seen to be following the traditional *advaitic* teaching in Hinduism. For example, Mahadevan sees continuity with Shankara's thought.[72] Ramaṇa himself was asked whether his teaching agreed with that of Shankara. His reply was "Bhagavan's teaching is an

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[66] Canto 2. Online translation of the *Tayumanavar* at www.magna.com.au/~prfbrown/thayumanavar/, published by Himalayan Academy.

[67] *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge*, p. 61.

[68] These references are cited in *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, p. 111.

[69] *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, p. 547.

[70] *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi,* pp. 555, 606. See also The *Teachings of Ramana Maharshi*, p. 70.

[71] *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, p. 606.

[72] T.M.P. Mahadevan: *Ramana Maharshi: The sage of Aruṇācala* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1977). It is interesting that Mahadevan does not emphasize other *advaitic* sources of Ramaṇa's ideas. As discussed in this thesis, these sources may have ideas quite different from Shankara's.

expression of his own experience and realization. Others find that it tallies with Sri Shankara's."[73] Ramaṇa emphasized his own experience, and not whether or not his thought agreed with that of Shankara. This emphasis on his own experience or *anubhava*, is significant. Halbfass says that Ramaṇa has become "a living symbol of the idea of religious experience."[74]

Eliot Deutsch has interpreted Shankara in terms of a philosophy of experience.[75] But Halbfass says that this emphasis on direct experience, or *anubhava* is absent in Shankara. Shankara does not base any veridical claims upon personal experiences of his own; he does not even speak about them. His ultimate authority is the Veda, and particularly the Upanishads.[76] The Upanishads are authorless, and do not record anybody's personal experience; they are rather an objective structure that guides experience. Shankara criticizes such principles as "voice of the heart"; guidance must be by the Vedas because there can be false *anubhava* which does not recognize non-duality. In order to recognize non-duality, Scripture is needed.[77]

Halbfass says that although Shankara uses the word *anubhava*, it is not be confused with "personal experiences" or "observations" which one could use as evidence for or against the Veda. It is rather used to refer to an ultimate experience, a goal, the knowledge of *Brahman* (*brahmajñāna*).[78] Halbfass seems to be rejecting a romantic interpretation of Shankara's references to experience or *anubhava*. But Shankara's view is consistent with what we have referred to as the Yogic Model of experience. Shankara says that we start with Scripture, but move beyond this knowledge to an ultimate experience. Experience is transcendence, not a subjective state of mind.

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[73]*The Teachings of Ramana Maharshi*, p. 15. It is interesting that this question was asked by Olivier Lacombe, the author of the article that most influenced Abhishiktānanda while he was still in France. At the time of his visit to Ramaṇa, Lacombe was the attaché consul for France in Calcutta. See Ramana Maharshi: *Golden Jubilee Souvenir* (Tiruvannamalai, 1946), p. 99.

[74] Wilhelm Halbfass, "The Concept of Experience in the Encounter Between India and the West," *India and Europe*, p. 384.

[75] Eliot Deutsch: *Advaita Vedanta: A Philosophical Reconstruction* (Honolulu, 1969).

[76] Wilhelm Halbfass: "The Concept of Experience in the Encounter Between India and the West," *India and Europe*, pp. 388.

[77] See also Anantanand Rambachan: *Accomplishing the Accomplished: The Vedas as a Source of Valid Knowledge in Sankara* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1991).

[78] This emphasis of *anubhava* as a goal, with Scripture as a basis, is more in accord with the Yogic Model of Experience rather than Immediate Experience.

Abhishiktānanda believed that Ramaṇa's state of trance is evidence of a direct experience (or *anubhava*) that is more immediate than the knowledge of the *mahavakya* "I am He". Because of this immediate experience, Abhishiktānanda believed that Ramaṇa was greater than Shankara. He still saw traces of duality in Shankara:

> Shankara understood *so'ham*–I am He; for Bhagavan there is only *aham*–I. The "ashes" of duality that still appeared in Shankara were never there in Bhagavan. Bhagavan's experience required years of "trance" before his body could be brought back to normal.[79]

This seems to reflect Ramaṇa's view that all meditation, even meditation on the great sayings or *mahavakyas*, requires an object to meditate on, whereas in self-enquiry there is only the subject and no object.[80]

Ramaṇa himself was asked whether Shankara was only an intellectual and not a realized person. He answered that we should not worry about Shankara, but should rather realize our own self. Ramaṇa also emphasized that the different doctrines of *advaita* were unimportant. We should seek the experience without asking questions about the exact nature of the experience. He said that non-dualism or dualism cannot be decided on theoretical grounds alone. If the Self is realized the question will not arise.[81]

3. Abhishiktānanda's Previous Information about Ramaṇa Maharshi

It is surprising that Abhishiktānanda had only two brief meetings with Ramaṇa; on neither occasion did he have any conversation with him. He says that Ramaṇa died before he was able to act as his *guru* (in fact, Ramaṇa did not accept any disciples and did not initiate anyone). The influence of Ramaṇa on Abhishiktānanda would seem to be more due to Abhishiktānanda's reading of his works and to speaking with his disciples than to his brief meetings with him. This reading was both before and after his meeting with Ramaṇa.

Even before he went to India, Abhishiktānanda had heard of Ramaṇa. But the information he gained was not very extensive. Surprisingly, he seems unaware of Paul

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[79] *Diary*, p. 76 (27.11.53).

[80] *The Teachings of Ramana Maharshi*, p. 112. As we have seen, Ramaṇa was influenced in these ideas by the *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha.*

[81] *The Teachings of Ramana Maharshi*, p. 27.

Brunton's *A Search in Secret India*, a book that is largely responsible for introducing Ramaṇa to the West. This book had already been translated into French while Abhishiktānanda was still living in France.[82] In *Secret*, Abhishiktānanda says that Ramaṇa's own writings had not yet been published in French, but that he had read some pamphlets and articles about him. An earlier draft of Secret gives more information on these early sources of information:

> Dès avant de venir aux Indes j'avais entendu parler de Ramana Maharshi: les conférences de Jean Herbert dans la collectién de Trois Lotus, la page si curieusement incompréhensive de Lanza del Vasto dans un livre pourtant remarquable, l'article surtout de Olivier Lacombe dans les *Études Carmélitaines*. Ses oeuvres elles-meme n'avait pas encore été traduites, par suite de mesquines querelles au sujets de droits d'auteur. Tout cela était assez pour me faire désirer vivement le rencontrer et en lui et autour de lui rencontrer cette Inde traditionelle et permanente sous les couches superficielles qui la rencouvrent, pour laquelle avant tout j'étais venu ici.[83]

The first source mentioned by Abhishiktānanda is a reference to Jean Herbert's book *Quelques grands penseurs de l'Inde*.[84] This is a 45 page booklet about several of India's holy men and women, including Ramaṇa, Aurobindo, Ramakrishna, Ananda Ma, and Gandhi. Herbert made two visits to Ramaṇa's ashram. He wanted to include references to Ramaṇa's work in a book, but he was refused permission.[85] This must be what Abhishiktānanda means by quarrels about author's rights. Herbert writes that, unlike other *gurus* in India, Ramaṇa hardly ever talks to his disciples. Being a *rishi*, one who has "seen" God, Ramaṇa is content to "radiate" in silence. Although a person may arrive with questions and problems, these problems are solved naturally after a brief time with Ramaṇa, Ramaṇa does not claim to teach anything new, but wants to guide his disciples into their own direct and personal experience of the Divine. Herbert briefly describes the method of Self-Enquiry. He says that this leads to the further step

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[82] Paul Brunton: *A Search in Secret India* (A Search in Secret India (London: Rider & Co. 1970, first published 1934). The French translation was published several years latter as *L'Inde Secrète* (Paris: Payot, 1940).

[83] I am indebted to Christian Hackbarth-Johnson for this information. This information is on page 43 of a typescript of Abhishiktānanda from 17.12.1962, starting as "Sous le signe de l´Arounachala", the second part of the manuscript of which the first part was *Gnānānanda.*

[84] Jean Herbert: *Quelques grands penseurs de l'Inde* (Paris: Les Trois Lotus, 1937).

[85]As reported in *The Maharshi*, January/Feburary 1996, Vol. 6-No. 1. See website www.ramana-maharshi.org/publish/janfeb96.htm. Herbert was eventually able to publish the works of Ramaṇa: *L'Enseignement de Ramana Maharshi* (Albin Michel, 1972).

of union with the Divine, which he explicitly compares to Jesus' words, "I and the Father are one."

Quelques grands penseurs de l'Inde gives only brief information about Ramaṇa. It was expanded in a book that Herbert published ten years later.[86] It is unclear whether Abhishiktānanda read this later work. In this later book, Herbert says that Ramaṇa does not usually appear to be conscious of anything that happens around him. He most often does not talk except about indifferent subjects, and he attaches a considerable importance to the perfection of each of his acts, even the act of undoing a package. He passes his days in an almost complete immobility, stretched out on a couch at the foot of which his disciples prostrate themselves and burn incense. For his whole life, Ramaṇa has allowed "commercial parasites" to install themselves around him and to monopolize him. Ramaṇa allows them to drive away, sometimes with clubs, and within his view, his oldest and most faithful disciples.[87]

On a positive note, Herbert writes that disciples receive from Ramaṇa an astonishing spiritual impulse. One look from him can change a person's life completely. An apparently insignificant word can open vast horizons, a sign from him can be more convincing than long explanations.

Herbert says that Ramaṇa has written a few verses of poetry, to which he allows the most contradictory interpretations to be given. In 1940, Herbert published *Études sur Ramana Maharshi,* containing French translations of some of these contradictory interpretations of Ramaṇa's teachings.[88] It is also not clear whether this book was ever read by Abhishiktānanda. But he later read studies by disciples of Ramaṇa. If these works were available to Herbert, they

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[86] Jean Herbert: *Spiritualité hindoue*. (Paris: Albin Michel, 1947). Monchanin referred Abhishiktānanda to this book in his letter dated August 13, 1949 See *Abbé Monchanin: Lettres au Père Le Saux*, ed. Françoise Jacquin (Paris: Cerf, 1995), p. 62.

[87] This may be a reference to Paul Brunton, who was forced away from the ashram in 1936. Brunton had given interviews in the press criticizing the way that the ashram was run. Brunton refers to "threats of physical violence"; he feared to ever return to the ashram. This fact is not mentioned by the ashram, which continues to publish Brunton's works praising Ramaṇa. Paul Brunton: *The Hidden Teaching Beyond Yoga* (Rider, 1969, first published 1941), pp. 16-18.

[88] Jean Herbert: *Etudes sur Ramana Maharshi* (Dervy-Livres, 1972, first published 1940). Herbert does not mention any prose works by Ramaṇa. Nor do the authors of the works he cites make any reference to *Vichara-sangraham* or *Self-Enquiry*.

were likely also available to Abhishiktānanda. They are important in that they show both monistic and non-monistic interpretations of Ramaṇa's teachings.

In his Preface to the book, Herbert says that the Maharshi's real teachings are in the way that he interprets works that he refers to. His responses to questions from disciples are usually intended not so much to provide information as to give the questioner a shock and making him or her reflect. Thus, the answers must always be seen in relation to the context in which they are given. Herbert says that the Maharshi believed that the paths to truth vary according to individuals; each can interpret what he hears or reads, as long as this interpretation helps him progress from the point he finds himself. Therefore, there can be contradictory interpretations.

Études sur Ramana Maharshi contains a long article by Dr. Lakshman, who gives a monistic interpretation to Ramaṇa's teachings.[89] It is Lakshman's view that Ramaṇa's experience at the age of 16 gave him an experience of the Self, but that it was not until later that Ramaṇa learned that there is no God, world outside of Self.

In contrast to this monistic interpretation, Swami Siddheswarānanda's article says that Ramaṇa's conception of life embraces the totality of life, which for an Indian includes the three states of waking, dream and deep sleep. One can not say that the exterior world did not interest Ramaṇa. Siddheswarānanda cites the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* as support for this viewpoint. He says that going beyond ego does not signify that one is dead to all sensibility. In realization of the Self, one does not just content oneself by denying false ideas of reality; the positive element is most important, and that is to know the place of the ego with respect to the totality. If that were not the case, says Siddheswarānanda, people could find emancipation without making any personal effort, like sleep without dreams, or like a loss of consciousness, where all perception disappears completely.

An article by another disciple, Anantachari, records that when Ramaṇa himself was asked for an interpretation of his poems, Ramaṇa said that he had no idea at all what he meant when he wrote the poetry. He reports Ramaṇa as saying, "How can I explain what I wanted to say? I didn't want to say anything at all." A similar viewpoint is expressed in the article by Swāmi

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[89] This is a French translation, with revisions, of *Maha Yoga or the Upanishadic Lore by "Who" (Tiruvannamalai, 1961).*

Tapasyānanda, who also asked Ramaṇa how his teaching corresponded to that set out in a book about him. Ramaṇa said that it was very difficult to know, since he himself did not have any particular doctrine. He himself did not have any desire to write a book. On this view, it is not that there are contrary interpretations of Ramaṇa but that he himself did not have any viewpoint. It is perhaps no wonder that Abhishiktānanda, too would later have difficulty in interpreting the "teachings" of Ramaṇa, and that Abhishiktānanda's own ideas alternated between monistic and non-monistic views. A further article by Swāmi Tapasyānanda is interesting in an unexpected way. He says that Ramaṇa has a unique imperturbable serenity, and that he just exists, without waiting for anything and without any anxiety at all. But he also says that he does not know whether or not Ramaṇa is really a *jñāni*. Swāmi Tapasyānanda also records that he asked Ramaṇa to instruct him in spiritual matters. Ramaṇa's first response was that the best instruction was by silence. According to Ramaṇa, the *advaitin* has no opinion no express and no teaching concerning Vedānta. Because he had no particular doctrine, Ramaṇa could not say whether books about him corresponded to his "teaching".

Abhishiktānanda's reference to the "curiously incomprehensive page" by Lanza del Vasto is a reference to the book *Return to the Source*.[90] First published in 1943, this book has sold over a million copies in France alone. The author gives a brief account of his meeting with Ramaṇa in 1937. Del Vasto is critical of Ramaṇa's appearance: "a little man who goes about half naked and remains perfectly simple in the midst of the great honours done to him"; "the grey eyes in his dark face are mild and vacant"; and "He has been laid on a small sofa styled in the worst taste." He criticizes the fact that Ramaṇa chewed betel nut and that he "sometimes opens his mouth wide and belches." He refers to the self-enquiry practiced by the disciples:

> The disciples look at Him who Is and think of what they are. Or, rather, they think of what they are not. They are not this arm or this leg, this head or this heart, they are not this body, they are not this anxiety or this joy, this hope or this remorse, this anger or this love, nor any of these changing emotions. They are not their thought, since their thought ceases when they sleep, whereas they do not cease to be. They are not the I that names itself.

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[90] Lanza del Vasto: *Return to the Source*, tr. Jean Sidgwick (Simon and Schuster, 1971, first published in France in 1943 under the title of *Le Pèlerinage aux Sources*), pp. 92-97. The quotations are from pp. 96-97.

Del Vasto rejects Ramaṇa's model of spirituality. He says,

> There is a Christian restlessness in me that prefers itself, imperfect as it is, to the perfect serenity of which I see the model here. If I had the rare courage and the power to dedicate myself to godliness, I should seek it, not so much in the peace of absolute sleep as in the frenzy of the enamoured soul. If I had the rare courage and the power to do so, I should still not think I had the right to seek salvation by myself and for myself. I should have to reach my own good through the good of others, and I maintain that charity is greater than wisdom.

This is extremely harsh criticism. Del Vasto left Ramaṇa's ashram to look for Gandhi at Wardha (the site of Gandhi's ashram), in order to "learn how to be a better Christian." It is clear that Del Vasto's article could not have influenced Abhishiktānanda to view Ramaṇa in any positive light.

Abhishiktānanda's main source of information about Ramaṇa came from the article by the Indologist Olivier Lacombe in the journal *Études Carmélitaines: Mystiques et Missionaires*. Olivier Lacombe had a three-hour visit with Ramaṇa in 1936. A record of his brief visit is contained in *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*.[91] Lacombe asked Ramaṇa whether his ideas corresponded with Shankara, and about the various yogas and methods in Hinduism. Ramaṇa told him that the method chosen will vary according to the standpoint of the aspirant, although he also said "To remain in the Self amounts to all these [yogas] in their highest sense." Once a person is realized, he will use his own language to teach about it. Lacombe recorded his reflections of this brief visit in the October 1937 volume of *Études Carmélitaines*.[92] Lacombe saw Indian yoga as a natural spirituality as distinct from the supernatural spirituality given by the Holy Spirit. Yoga is a conquest of the soul by itself, a kind of dis-incarnation, the isolation of the spirit in its native and original purity. Yoga starts by emptying one's consciousness and proceeds ultimately to an intuitive knowing beyond sensing and discursive thought.

Lacombe refers to Ramaṇa as a *yogi*. He relates the story of Ramaṇa's enlightenment at the age of 16, and how Ramaṇa did not have previous knowledge or training. He says that the

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[91] *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi* (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramanasramam, 1994), pp. 155-157.

[92] Olivier Lacombe: "Sur le Yoga indien", *Études Carmélitaines*, October, 1937, pp. 163-176. The next year the same Journal (October, 1938) published another article by Lacombe, "Un Exemple de Mystique Naturelle: L'Inde." and an article by Maritain: "L'Experience Mystique Naturelle et le Vide". Maritain recommends that Catholics should study the experience of the Self where all religious implications are absent. The 1938 volume of *Études Carmélitaines* contains a full page photograph of Ramana Maharshi. In 1954 Abhishiktānanda refers Fr. Lemarié to these articles. *Lettres d'un sannyāsī chrétien à Joseph Lemarié*, p. 103 (17.3.54).

foundation of Ramaṇa's mysticism is the "grasping of the soul by itself" in the depth of its substance, a depth that is beyond even the most spiritual actions, and beyond the root of our powers of knowing and loving. This grasping of the soul by itself is a radical conversion, and also a passage from extraversion to introversion. For Ramaṇa, the shock of fear of death rendered him immediately introspective or introverted. Ramaṇa's later sayings as a sage were designed to give a similar psychological shock to those who asked him questions. He wanted to plunge them into their depths, to convert them in a radical introversion. But although this experience of introversion is valuable, Lacombe says that Ramaṇa "exalted the experience of the individual self to the experience of the universal self."

Disciples of Ramaṇa soon knew about Lacombe's 1937 article in *Études Carmélitaines*. It is referred to by Swami Siddheswarānanda, one of the writers in Herbert's *Études sur Ramana Maharshi*. Swami Siddheswarānanda disputes the characterization of Ramaṇa as a *yogi*. He also disagrees with the view that Ramaṇa proceeds by a psychological shock that was the equivalent of his own fear of death and by which he became introverted. He says that Maharshi never provoked a shock, because he did not have any preconceived idea of the results of his action. He was just not concerned with psychological or philosophical problems.

Monchanin also read and referred to Lacombe's articles, including the article on Ramaṇa and yoga. Contrary to Lacombe, Monchanin did not think that the idea of a natural mysticism based on enstasy necessarily implied a distinction between nature and supernature.[93]

While still in France, Abhishiktānanda had also read other works about Hindu religious experience:

> Deep contacts with Hindu thought, books and people. Even before I came here, they had already made a mark on me. A hidden spiritual sympathy, this sense of the Unity, of the ONE, of God at the source of my being, of the fading out of this 'ego' as soon as you penetrate into the interior of yourself so as to reach the unique 'I'.[94]

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[93] Letters dated November, 1953 and February 24, 1954. *Abbé Monchanin: Lettres au Père Le Saux*, ed. Françoise Jacquin (Paris: Cerf, 1995), pp. 119 and 134. Monchanin's views should be contrasted with those of P. de Lubac who insisted on the distinction between nature and supernature.

[94] *Letters*, p. 53 (L, 10.2.52).

Based on his rather limited knowledge about Ramaṇa, Abhishiktānanda wanted to meet him and to have his *darśan* (public viewing). He believed that in this way he would find the true India that is often obscured by superficialities.

4. Time Spent with Ramaṇa Maharshi

Abhishiktānanda's first meeting with Ramaṇa was in January 1949. He and Monchanin had received their Bishop's encouragement to spend time at Ramaṇa's *ashram*. Monchanin had had two previous visits to the ashram. Abhishiktānanda considered this visit to Ramaṇa's *ashram* as an initiation into Hindu monastic life.[95] Abhishiktānanda was filled with great anticipation. He thought that it could not fail to be a high point in his life:

> Something had to take place, when once a physical contact was established between myself and him. Of that I had not the slightest doubt: this man had a message for me, a message which, if not conveyed in human words, would at least be spiritually communicated; for, as it had been clearly explained to me, spoken words were the least important of the ways by which the Sage communicated his experience.[96]

Abhishiktānanda's expectations of what to expect upon meeting Ramaṇa seem to derive from Herbert's descriptions of Ramaṇa. But although Abhishiktānanda had high expectations, and had been told what to expect from Ramaṇa, he in fact felt let down and disappointed. Ramaṇa seemed so ordinary, like a kindly grandfather, shrewd and serene. When Abhishiktānanda entered the room, Ramaṇa was reading his mail.

> If I had hoped to meet a perfect inhabitant of the other world, I would have been greatly disappointed. I could see for myself and was also told that Bhagavān has passed the stage of ecstasy. Henceforth he is able to attend to the details of daily life without the concentration of his thought on the Self being impaired to the slightest extent.[97]

Abhishiktānanda saw Ramaṇa at his *darśan*. By this time, the *darśan* had become a kind of ritual. Abhishiktānanda was bothered by the way Ramaṇa was called '*Bhagavān'* [Lord] and

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[95] *Diary*, p. 8 (24.1.49).

[96] *Secret*, p. 4.

[97] *Diary*, p. 9 (24.1.49).

by the prostrations that were made to him.[98] Ramaṇa was treated practically as if he was a *mūrti* [image] in one of the Hindu temples.[99] Monchanin introduced Abhishiktānanda to Ramaṇa, but Abhishiktānanda stayed silent. He says that Ramaṇa's response to his introduction by Monchanin was with "a smile so full of kindness as to be unforgettable."[100] Abhishiktānanda concentrated on looking with deep attention at Ramaṇa. He says that at first he looked in vain for the halo that he had been told to expect around him. Furthermore, Ramaṇa was too distant, being separated from the crowd of devotees by the sanctuary and by the privileged disciples who remained constantly at his side.[101] He had read so much about the peace emanating from the ashram that he was "frankly disappointed".[102]

Abhishiktānanda and Monchanin went back to see Ramaṇa in the afternoon of the first day. At this time, Abhishiktānanda seemed more impressed by the rhythmic chanting of the priests, which he refers to as "spell binding". He says that these chants, which he was hearing for the first time, "issue from the archetypal sources of being, and that they irresistibly draw those who chant them or hear them into the same most secret sources of being." [103] He gave up trying to understand the chanting, and simply allowed himself to be held and carried along. In the evening, there were questions to Ramaṇa by his followers. Abhishiktānanda did not understand the Tamil language at that time and so did not understand what was being said.

Abhishiktānanda awoke the next day with a fever, but he went to the *darśan* anyway. In the afternoon, Monchanin introduced him to a disciple of Ramaṇa named Ethel Merstone, and he expressed his disappointment and skepticism to her. She said, "You are not receptive; you must be receptive, open, before *Bhagavān*." Merstone told him he should make himself empty. His meditation must be one of pure expectation. He should not insist that everything should come by the paths he had previously determined.

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[98]*Diary*, p. 7 (24.1.49), *Secret*, p. 5. But Abhishiktānanda says he had forgotten that the French and English use terms like 'Monseigneur' and 'My Lord'.

[99] Abhishiktānanda speaks of the "incorrigible ritualism" of the Hindus.

[100] *Diary*, p. 8 (24.1.49).

[101] *Guru*, p. 11.

[102] *Diary*, p. 9 (24.1.49).

[103] *Secret*, p. 7.

Abhishiktānanda attended the evening *darśan* in a condition that was half dreaming. He was not sure whether this was due to a new receptivity in himself or whether it was due to his fever. But he says that something released in him "zones of para-consciousness":

> Even before my mind was able to recognize the fact, and still less to express it, the invisible halo of this Sage had been perceived by something in me deeper than any words. A melody made itself felt, and especially an all-embracing ground bass…In the Sage of Arunāchala of our own time I discerned the unique Sage of the eternal India, the unbroken succession of her sages, her ascetics, her seers; it was as if the very soul of India penetrated to the very depths of my own soul and held mysterious communion with it. It was a call which pierced through everything, rent it in pieces and opened a mighty abyss.[104]

Abhishiktānanda refers to Ramaṇa's expression as that "unique presence of the self to the self within the self"[105]

Because of his fever, Abhishiktānanda returned that evening to his own ashram (Shantivanam) at Kulittalai, where he stayed in bed three days. His dreams were all about Ramaṇa. In these dreams, he would try to incorporate into his previous mental structures his experiences with Ramaṇa. These attempts were always in vain.[106] He wrote to his family about his "Pilgrimage to a Hindu 'saint' who is regarded by Hindus as God himself. Extremely thought-provoking."[107]

Abhishiktānanda saw Ramaṇa only one more time, again in 1949, when he spent ten days at Tiruvannamalai. On this visit, Monchanin did not accompany Abhishiktānanda. Alone, Abhishiktānanda lived as a Hindu. The first day he dressed all in white, but the next day he wore the orange *kavi* of the Hindu *sannyāsī.* People addressed him as "Swami".[108]

At the time of this second visit, Ramaṇa had been diagnosed with a tumour, and visitors were being turned away. But due to the intervention of Ethel Merstone, Abhishiktānanda was allowed to stay. At the *darśan* of Maharshi, Abhishiktānanda tried not to allow his efforts at

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[104] *Letters*, p. 30. See also *Secret*, p. 9. This seems to contradict his more spontaneous account that he did not perceive any halo. Perhaps he was able to discern it only when he was more receptive.

[105] *Secret*, p. 21.

[106] *Secret*, p. 9.

[107] *Letters*, p. 30 (F, 13.2.49).

[108] *Letters*, p. 31 (F, 29.8.49).

rationalization to become an obstacle as they had been on the first visit, and he tried simply to attend to the hidden influence.[109] Because Ramaṇa was ill, no conversation with him was possible. Merstone pointed out to Abhishiktānanda that at Arunāchala, there was not only Ramaṇa, but also the Temple and the mountain itself, all of which were means of grace.[110] This seems to be the first idea by Abhishiktānanda that he could look to Arunāchala as a source of inspiration and guidance.

At the time of this second visit, Merstone put Abhishiktānanda in touch with other disciples who tried to explain to him the teachings of Ramaṇa. He met a Brahmin who is unnamed. The Brahmin told Abhishiktānanda that the sufferings of Ramaṇa reminded him of the suffering of the Lord Jesus. The Brahmin also told him that the central point in Ramaṇa's teaching was the mystery of the heart. One must find the heart deep within oneself, beyond mind and thought; one must cease identifying oneself with what one merely has or does.

> According to this disciple, the most central point in Srī Ramaṇa's teaching is the mystery of the heart, of which the best treatment is that by Ganapati Sāstri [another disciple] in his *Srī Ramaṇa Gītā*. Find the heart deep within oneself, beyond mind and thought, make that one's permanent dwelling, cut all the bonds which keep this heart at the level of sense and outward consciousness, all the fleeting identifications of what one *is* with what one *has* or what one *does*.[111]

This Brahmin disciple copied out for Abhishiktānanda a verse from the *Mahānārāyana Upanishad*, 12.14:

> Heaven is within the inner chamber,
> the glorious place
> which is entered by those who renounce themselves.

Monchanin visited Ramaṇa on February 14, 1950, while Abhishiktānanda stayed at Shantivanam. Monchanin reports that he was filled with admiration for Ramaṇa. He asked himself whether he was the victim of a mirage; he concluded it was not, because he did not stop for an instant of being the lucid master of himself. Nevertheless he says that he was "seduced" by Ramaṇa. Monchanin writes that there was mystery in this man who had found by his own experience the essence of India's mysticism–"an unpitying, obstinate negation of all that is not

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[109] *Secret*, p. 11.

[110] *Secret*, p. 13.

the Necessary One [l'unique nécessaire]".[112] Monchanin visited him a fourth time on March 7, 1950. Ramaṇa was dying, but he seemed to be detached and almost absent to his own body. Monchanin wrote Abhishiktānanda that the death of Ramaṇa should not sadden beyond measure those at the ashram, because the *Shakti* is immortal. He says that Ramaṇa's devotees call it "mother".[113]

Abhishiktānanda wanted to visit Ramaṇa a third time in the spring of 1950. But Ramaṇa died two days before his planned visit.

At the end of 1950, Abhishiktānanda spent three days at Ramaṇa's *ashram* with some European friends.[114] He meditated and he listened to chants, including Ramaṇa's own composition *Upadesa Sāram.* A *pūjā* [ceremonial worship] was given in honour of Ramaṇa at the *samādhi* [the monument erected at the tomb of Ramaṇa]. A similar *pūjā* was held at the temple and in the small room where he had died, or where, as it was explained to Abhishiktānanda, Ramaṇa had achieved *mahānirvāna*, renouncing for ever all manifestation under the conditions of space and time. A statue had been erected at the *samādhi*; a verse [*sloka*] from the *Ramaṇa Gita* was engraved on it:

> In the midst of the cave of the heart,
> in form of the I, in form of the Self,
> unique and solitary,
> Brahman's glory shines
> directly from Himself on Himself.
> Penetrate deep within,
> your thought piercing to its source,
> your mind having plunged into itself,
> with breath and sense held close in the depths,
> your whole self fixed in yourself,
> and there, simply BE![115]

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111 *Secret*, p. 14. The reference is to Ramaṇa's own verse in *Ramaṇa Gītā,* p. 19, Ch. II, v. 2.

112 Letter dated March 6, 1950, cited in *Abbé Monchanin: Lettres au Père Le Saux*, ed. Françoise Jacquin (Paris: Cerf, 1995), p. 72. See also *Jules Monchanin: Mystique de l'Inde, mystère chretien*, ed. Suzanne Siauve (Paris: Fayard, 1974), p. 293.

113 Letter May 1, 1950. *Abbé Monchanin: Lettres au Père Le Saux*, ed. Françoise Jacquin (Paris: Cerf, 1995), p. 77.

114 *Secret*, p. 20.

115 *Secret*, p. 21. See *Ramaṇa Gītā*, p. 18. Ch. II, v.2.

Many of Abhishiktānanda's later writings echo the ideas in this *sloka*.

At the time of this visit in 1950, Abhishiktānanda also "providentially" met another Brahmin, Śrī Kuppusāmī Aiyar. Aiyar showed him the hermitages or 'caves' on the mountainside of Arunāchala, and he introduced him to some of the dwellers in these caves. This was a "real revelation" to Abhishiktānanda. Aiyar also arranged for Abhishiktānanda to take over one of these caves for meditation.[116]

Abhishiktānanda stayed in caves on Arunāchala on several occasions.[117] In 1952, Abhishiktānanda spent several months in the cave Vanatti on Arunāchala. He had contacts with *sādhus*, temple priests and members of the Ramaṇa ashram. People offered signs of reverence to him. He would sometimes go down to the *pūjā* that was celebrated every Friday at the ashram. It was a ceremony that lasted almost three hours. There would be a recitation of 300 names of *Devi* [the Goddess, or *Śakti*].[118] Abhishiktānanda also visited the Temple in Tiruvannamalai. In 1953 he was there for the ten day Festival of Lights (*Thr̄bam*) in the middle of November. He made the 12-kilometer circuit of the mountain with pilgrims. He describes how that same month he spent a night in the underground crypt of Patala Linga at the Temple in Tiruvannamalai. This was where Ramaṇa had spent the first few months after his enlightenment. Abhishiktānanda says that during this night at Patala Linga, he had a 'meeting' with Ramaṇa. This meeting "took place on a plane that has nothing in common with any visual, auditory or psychic phenomenon whatever–literally at the one level where Ramaṇa can always be truly met." It was an attempt at a 'real' contact, and a "communion that makes light of distances, whether in time or space."[119]

In May 1954, Abhishiktānanda and Monchanin explored Hinduism for six weeks. They went to Ramaṇa's ashram again. Monchanin describes this visit:

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[116] *Secret*, p. 22.

[117] In 1952, he stayed in Vanatti cave for ten days in total silence from March 29. He stayed in the same cave from May 19-Aug.10; the first three weeks were in silence; he moved to the quieter cave of Aruptāl Tīrtham in July. In 1953, he was in this second cave from March 3-31, and again from Nov.3-Dec. 27. In 1954, he stayed for a week at Easter in the cave of Skanda Ashram, where *Ramaṇa* had lived. Then he stayed in the cave of Sādei Sāmī from May 26-June 30. This was an empty cave he had not previously known about. In 1955 he was at Arunāchala for parts of January, July (in Virupaksha cave) and December. In 1954 he stayed briefly. His last stay was December 1955.

[118] *Secret*, p. 44.

[119] *Secret*, pp. 114-116.

> We both had the impression that we were living a 'Golden Legend' (where what is perceived and what is imagined are indistinguishable), and at times to be in direct contact with an experience, a transcendent apprehension which completely eludes all images, concepts and norms. A pure mysticism which, like the horizon, retires before the observer. [120]

From Christmas, 1954 to February 1955 Abhishiktānanda stayed in a cottage at Ramaṇa's ashram. He met Ethel Merstone again, and had long talks with her. He also met other disciples of Ramaṇa. One of these disciples was Major Chadwick. Chadwick had collected the funds for a celebration every Wednesday, *chakra-pūjā*. This was a very long ceremony in honour of the divine *śakti* [energy or power]. This *śakti* was symbolically represented by the *Śrī Chakra* in *kundalini yoga*; it was like a kind of pyramid on a square base, at the top of which is a series of superimposed triangles. This emphasis on *śakti* and *kundalini* among disciples of Ramaṇa is significant, since these ideas play a large role in Abhishiktānanda's own thought.

Another disciple he met at this time was S.S. Cohen, with whom Abhishiktānanda had some of his best conversations concerning Ramaṇa's teaching. But Abhishiktānanda found Cohen rather too intellectual in his approach.[121]

He also met Sundaresa Aiyar. Aiyar told him, "If you want to know exactly what the Mahārshi thought, you must yourself become what he was. You will then have nothing further to ask."[122] Later in his life, Abhishiktānanda did attempt to become like Ramaṇa.

Another person that Abhishiktānanda met is referred to only as Sujāta; she was a Buddhist nun. Abhishiktānanda discussed Zen Buddhism with her. She also had many books by D.T. Suzuki, which Abhishiktānanda "read with the greatest interest."[123] The fact that a disciple of Ramaṇa was also interested in Zen Buddhism explains many of the parallels that Abhishiktānanda later sought to draw between *advaitic* experience and Zen Buddhism.

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[120] *Letters*, p. 73. According to a note, the "Golden Legend" probably refers to the story of Sunderammṟl, told in *Secret*, pp. 97-101. Abhishiktānanda retold the story and compared I to "un conte de légende dorée."

[121] *Secret,* p. 38.

[122] *Secret*, p. 41.

[123] *Secret*, p. 43.

Abhishiktānanda also met Dr. T.M.P. Mahadevan.[124] Mahadevan was a professor of philosophy (he has been previously referred to in the Introduction to this thesis). Mahadevan had had an interest in Ramaṇa at least as early as 1930 when he was 18 years old.[125]

At this time Abhishiktānanda also read more of the books about Ramaṇa. He read some commentaries on Ramaṇa's Forty Verses [*Ulladu Nārpadu*]. He was surprised by the differences of interpretation in these commentaries. He thought that the commentary by T.V. Kapali Sāstrī was rather forced in making Ramaṇa's thought to conform with Aurobindo.[126]

5. Disciples of Ramaṇa Maharshi who had a major influence

a) H.W.L. Poonja ("Harilal")

'Harilal' is the name used by Abhishiktānanda to refer to H.W.L. Poonja.[127] In Abhishiktānanda's opinion, he had never met an *advaitin* who was so sincere and authentic. What is surprising in this opinion is that Harilal was not a *sannyāsī*, but rather a manager of iron and manganese mines in Mysore.

Abhishiktānanda met Harilal in 1953, while Abhishiktānanda was meditating in one of the caves.[128] Harilal had been one of Ramaṇa's disciples. Harilal was extremely intuitive, once getting off a bus in Rishikesh just before it crashed.[129] Harilal had seen a vision of Ramaṇa before ever meeting him–he had 'seen' Ramaṇa in the Punjab at the same time that Ramaṇa was actually in his ashram at Tiruvannamalai.[130] He now told Abhishiktānanda that Abhishiktānanda

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[124] *Secret*, p. 82, ft. 2.

[125] Paul Brunton: *The Notebooks of Paul Brunton* (Burdett, NY: Larson, 1984). In vol. 8 of *Notebooks*, p. 223, 6:150, he says it was in 1930). In Vol. 10, p. 133, 2:413 he says that Prof. T.M. Mahadevan was also present as an 18 year old student.

[126] *Secret*, p. 41. This shows a familiarity with Aurobindo's thought at the time. Over time, Abhishiktānanda had an increasing appreciation for Aurobindo.

[127] H.W.L. Poonja appears in the video, "Abide as the self: The Essential Teachings of Ramaṇa Maharshi" (Inner Directions, 1995).

[128] *Secret*, p. 81.

[129] *Secret*, p. 95.

[130] *Secret*, p. 90.

had "called" for him to come. He had passed Abhishiktānanda in the bazaar, and had seen this call in his eyes.

Harilal's *advaita* was more extreme than Abhishiktānanda was accustomed to. Harilal asked Abhishiktānanda what the use was of knowing Sanskrit and other languages, or of reading so much:

> You have read a great deal–naturally–so did I at one time, but now I read little (…) There is only one book, the 'living' book that is within you …Reading is only one step on the ladder. Instead of reading, think (i.e., meditate); instead of thinking, keep essential silence within, a silence beyond (…) both the thought and the non-thought that within you meet the Supreme.[131]

and

> Leave aside study for thought, thought for the void, the void for what is beyond the void. Why learn languages? What language do you need to converse with the Self?[132]

Harilal said that everything that one says, reads, writes and thinks about God is far from God. Ramaṇa had told Harilal that you have to take a leap. Only when you leave everything behind, *devas* [Gods] along with everything else, can you find the vision that has no beginning and no ending, the vision of Being, of the Self. The true Self is what remains when nothing is seen or thought any more. Just realize that *you are*. *Tat tvam asi*–you are That! He said that there was only one thing that Abhishiktānanda lacked--to "enter into the *guhā*, the cave of your heart, and there realize that *you are*!"[133]

Harilal tried to persuade Abhishiktānanda to take the final plunge into pure *advaita* and to abandon every kind of religious observance.[134] He said that *advaita* is not a religion, and is not concerned about religious observance. Harilal said, "You call yourself a Christian; but that is meaningless at the stage you have reached."[135] Harilal advised Abhishiktānanda to stop his

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[131] *Letters*, p. 62 (L. 29.4.53). This same thought is incorporated by Abhishiktānanda in *Ermites du Saccidananda,* p. 156.

[132] *Diary* p. 64, (14.3.53).

[133] *Secret*, p. 86. This language recalls the admonition of Jesus to the rich young ruler in the Gospels.

[134] *Diary*, p. 66 (23.3.53).

[135] *Secret*, p. 84.

prayers, his worship and his contemplation of this or that. The prayers and other religious rituals are unimportant because the *ātman* is bound by nothing.[136]

According to Abhishiktānanda, Harilal did not maintain his own adherence to this radical *advaita*. By 1971, Harilal had gone back to the path of *bhakti*, or devotion. He stressed an *abheda-bhakt*i [devotion without any distinction between the Lord and his devotees]. Harilal had had a vision of the Cosmic Christ coming to him, where Christ was higher than the heavens and also infinitely close.[137]

Still later, Harilal became a *guru* with his own followers. He was known as Sri Poonja, or more often, Papaji. He died in 1997. A collection of his poems and sayings from 1990 to 1997 was published in 2000.[138] These teachings emphasize a radical *advaita* of a monistic kind, denying any reality to the world. He says that the ultimate truth is that "nothing ever existed." This radical *advaita* seems to indicate that Harilal had changed his views again since 1971.

b) A. Shastri

A. Shastri was a disciple of Ramaṇa and of Ganapati Sastri (one of the first disciples of Ramaṇa). Abhishiktānanda met with Shastri in November 1953. Shastri spoke to him about *kundalini*. He also helped Abhishiktānanda to integrate Patañjali's yoga with Ramaṇa's teachings.[139] According to Shastri, no *advaitic* experience would be possible without the entry into trance produced by the awakening of the *kundalini*. He said that Ramaṇa had told him that the 'grace' needed for the supreme experience, *arul*, is in reality nothing else than the kundalinī *śakti.*

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[136] *Secret*, p. 93.

[137] *Letters*, pp. 242-243 (SG 26.1.71). *Diary* p. 332 (24.7.71).

[138] Sri H.W.L. Poonja: *The Truth Is* (Samuel Weiser, 2000). The Introduction to the book claims that Poonja was realized when he was 8 years old, but that this Realization "infinitely blossomed" when in his 30's he met Ramana Maharshi. There is no mention of changes in his teachings.

[139] *Diary*, p. 77 (27.11.53). Patañjali is the author of the classical text on Yoga, the *Yoga-Sūtra*. This integration would also help Abhishiktānanda to integrate Gnānānanda's teaching, which emphasized meditation.

c) Dr. Dinshaw K. Mehta

Dr. Dinshaw K. Mehta was another disciple of Ramaṇa who had an important influence on Abhishiktānanda. D.K. Mehta was a Parsee, the founder of the Society of the Servants of God. Mehta had also been Gandhi's doctor. Abhishiktānanda met him in Bombay in July 1955.[140]

Mehta helped Abhishiktānanda in resolving his crisis of trying to incorporate his experience with Ramaṇa into his previous mental structures. Mehta gave Abhishiktānanda guidance in the form of mystical and esoteric messages that he said had been received at night from a "personal but gnostic Christ." Abhishiktānanda said that these *scripts* of Mehta were not revelation dictated from outside, but were rather the often painful translation of a "revelation" received from a higher plane. This revelation is incapable of reaching the level of normal consciousness, but passes through ideas, images and symbols of the subconscious and finally manifests in automatic writing as a result of yogic concentration.[141]

Abhishiktānanda regarded his meeting with Mehta as providential. He believed that his trip to Bombay had been only a means for him to meet Mehta. It was a "turning point" for Abhishiktānanda.[142] But he continued to have doubts. He wondered whether it was a bad sign that during this visit, the *ara*, the heavy stone that he used in the Eucharist, was broken.[143]

Mehta introduced Abhishiktānanda to his method of analyzing the different levels of consciousness and to a technique of psychological introspection that would help him to integrate his inner conflicts. Abhishiktānanda describes this meditation as a kind of psychoanalytical treatment:

> Meditation along these lines is very like a method of psychoanalytical treatment. It is a matter of integrating into consciousness the whole world of the "memory". In order at the same time to bring it to the consciousness of this trans-liminal and through the development of consciousness, beyond this trans-liminal. And this

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[140] *Diary*, pp. 106ff. (27.7.55). *Letters*, p. 82 (l, 18.7.55). D.K. Mehta should of course not be confused with J.L. Mehta.

[141] *Diary*, p. 108 (28.7.55).

[142] *Diary*, p. 140 (19.1.56). Abhishiktānanda says that this "turning point" had been "long ago recognized in the lines of my hand." *Diary*, p. 109 (29.7.55). It is not clear who did this reading of Abhishiktānanda's palm.

[143] *Diary*, p. 111 (31.7.55). He had not been saying Mass for several days.

> involves a transformation of consciousness itself. For better and for worse, since this "trans-gression" [passing-over] of the immediate world of our experience leads us at the same time into the subconscious and the supra-conscious. […] In the last analysis we are in C.G. Jung's world of archetypes. Metapsychic powers are then necessarily attained, together with potential effects on the body and on matter.[144]

For Mehta, the human being must reach level of the supra-conscious, and must realize God's presence in time and by his works.[145] In the journey from superficial ego to the fundamental *aham* [I or Self], there are a number of stages or levels. There are the seven mansions of St. Teresa, the seven levels of Gurdjieff, the seven *chakras* of Hinduism, the seven heavens of Hinduism. "All these levels are essentially or rather primarily psychological levels, the stages in the self's realization of itself." The Christic level is the level interior to one's own *aham*. And the level of angels is also interior to a person. This view that there are stages in the journey to the real Self will be considered in the next chapter.

According to Mehta's scripts, Abhishiktānanda was to practice total surrender and to devote himself entirely to deeper interiorization. One must have absolute faith in the mystery of the beyond into which one throws oneself.[146] Mehta wanted Abhishiktānanda to give up all reading.[147] Mehta also wanted him to abandon the Christian faith; this was unacceptable to Abhishiktānanda. Mehta asked him to concentrate on a single point, a thought, a feeling or a perception. But Abhishiktānanda says that meditating on a symbol no longer worked for him:

> I am already too Hindu and too advaitic to do that. Even the symbol of the Cross no longer speaks to me. So I concentrate on the Heart of Christ, *hrid*, in the Hindu understanding of the mystery of the Sacred Heart.[148]

Mehta's advice led to Abhishiktānanda's relinquishing of his previous 'conception' of *advaita*.[149] The idea of total surrender seems to be one of the most important ideas that Abhishiktānanda obtained from Mehta.

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[144] *Diary* p. 107 (28.7.55).

[145] *Diary*, pp. 110, 11 (30.7.55).

[146] *Diary*, p. 107 (27.7.55). *Letters*, p. 83.

[147] *Letters*, p. 85 (L. 18.9.55). In this letter he calls Mehta his *guru.*

[148] *Diary*, p. 107 (27.7.55).

Abhishiktānanda met Mehta again on his trip north in March 1957. On the way, Abhishiktānanda had stopped to meet with Gnānānanda and Harilal. Abhishiktānanda spent 10 days at Mehta's bungalow 20 miles from Poona. At this time Abhishiktānanda expressed the hope that Mehta would one day reach the full *advaitic* experience, which Abhishiktānanda then regarded as inferior to his own experience.[150] This statement shows that Abhishiktānanda had by this time moved away from some of the teachings of Mehta.

In August 1967, Abhishiktānanda spent another four days with Mehta. Mehta was giving advice to seekers. Every evening people came to Mehta for advice. They would prostrate before him and record what he said on tape.[151]

In 1970, Mehta wanted to involve Abhishiktānanda in a project to introduce a spiritual element into Indian politics.[152] Abhishiktānanda did not accept this involvement. By this time, Abhishiktānanda is referring to Mehta as a 'prophet' who makes decisions by "pure pseudo-inspiration."

6. The influence of Ramaṇa Maharshi on Abhishiktānanda

Ramaṇa had the most marked influence on Abhishiktānanda.[153] Many of Abhishiktānanda's writings describe the teachings of Ramaṇa Maharshi.[154] In 1955, Abhishiktānanda compared the influence of Ramaṇa to that of Christ:

> The Christ, whom I first knew and loved in his historical life in Jesus, and then in his epiphany in the Church, at the end of time (of my time) has appeared to me in the form of Bhagavān Śrī Ramaṇa.[155]

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[149] *Diary*, p. 114 (3.8.55). Abhishiktānanda finds it 'funny' that his new 'master', Mehta, was not in the traditional Hindu or purely *advaitin* line.

[150] *Letters*, p. 114)

[151] *Letters*, p. 193 (l, 27.8.67).

[152] *Letters*, p. 225 (L, 25.1.70).

[153] This is Panikkar's view. *Diary*, Preface p. XIII.

[154] One of the most extensive accounts is in *Saccidananda*, 19-41. See also *The Secret of Arunāchala* and *Guru and Disciple*, where Abhishiktānanda describes Ramaṇa's teaching.

[155] *Diary*, p. 129, (28.10.1955).

He recommended Ramaṇa's method of finding liberation as preferable to all other ways, such as psychological methods.[156] He says that in Ramaṇa's method, we find that the fundamental experience of *advaita* is innate within us.[157] Abhishiktānanda says that he found grace, peace and non-duality in Ramaṇa, and he sought to find the *Bhagavan* in himself. In 1971, he still saw Ramaṇa as his ideal:

> The ideal which is most profoundly mine–the one to which unconsciously everything in me is referred–is that of Ramaṇa–such a perfect example of Vedānta–and this ideal of Ramaṇa would not have been able to root itself at such a depth in my psyche if it had not encountered a call already expressed, a '*surfacing*', an "awakening".[158]

It is interesting that Abhishiktānanda relates this idealization of Ramaṇa to the fact that ever since his youth, he had unconsciously envied those who did not believe or those who were educated outside of all belief:

> I envied their *autonomy*, in the noblest sense of the word. It seemed to me that they possessed something of which I was ignorant and which I did not have.[159]

Abhishiktānanda says that he transferred this envy to the saints of Vedānta, including Ramaṇa.

Abhishiktānanda also appreciated the lack of speculation or emotion that in Ramaṇa's teachings. Abhishiktānanda thought that many Hindus are overly logical in their expositions of the *advaitic* experience. But he was also opposed to what he believed was excessive emotionalism in others:

> But the so-called Hindu Masters of today are either too speculative or too emotional. I had the grace of meeting Ramaṇa and Gnānānanda …and it was truly at their feet that I learnt something from the Upanishads.[160]

But later he was forced to accept some measure of emotionalism:

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[156] *Letters*, p. 201 (to Sister Térese). (TL 1.6.68; 8.6.68).

[157] *Intériorité*, p. 183. Here he says that the experience is at the dawn of the supra-mental, to use Aurobindo's terminology.

[158] *Diary*, p. 328 (2.7.71).

[159] *Diary*, p. 328 (2.7.71).

[160] *Letters*, p. 218 (OB 24.8.69).

> My rationalism finds itself forced to accept (with dread) a dimension of *emotion*, in the best sense, within the spiritual life […] Who has the right to set limits in advance to the Spirit? The Spirit is in David's dance and in the visions of our *bhaktas* here, just as much as in the silence of those we call sages.[161]

Some of this emotionalism he came to appreciate during his encounter with Gñānānanda.

D. Gnānānanda

1. Who was Gnānānanda?

The name 'Gnānānanda' means 'knowledge which is itself bliss' or 'both knowledge and bliss'. Abhishiktānanda writes, "No one ever struck me like that man did.[162] He details his meeting with Gñānānanda in *Guru and Disciple*. This book on Gnānānanda was completed in 1968. It was written in the third person–Abhishiktānanda refers to himself in the book as 'Vanya' in order to protect his anonymity. He did not believe that the book would be understood or published in his lifetime. His fear that the book would be rejected was justified in view of the Paris censor's rejection of an earlier work of his, *Guhāntara*. However, he did live to see the publication of *Guru and Disciple*. It was originally published in 1970 as *Gnānānanda, un maître spirituel du pays tamoul*. In the last year of his life, Abhishiktānanda said that it was his best book and did not need to be re-written:

> Of all that I have written, *Gnānānanda* is almost the only thing that remains afloat. All the rest consists of *nāmarūpa* amusing itself with the 'theology of fulfilment'.[163]

Even as late as 1966, Abhishiktānanda was not aware of any writings by Gnānānanda.[164] But there is a book that has since been published providing transcripts of some of his teachings, which were recorded by some of his devotees.[165]

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[161] *Letters*, p. 244, (FT, 27.2.71).

[162] *Letters*, p. 179. (MT, 4.4.66).

[163] *Letters*, p. 286 (MC, 4.2.73).

[164] *Letters*, p. 203 (MT, 3.7.66). "Gnānānanda wrote nothing, but he said and always said, marvellous things."

[165] C.T. Indra (ed.): Sadguru *Gnānānanda: His Life Personality and Teachings* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1979). It is interesting that this book makes reference to and includes some of Abhishiktānanda's writings about Gnānānanda, including lengthy and appreciative excerpts from *Guru and Disciple*. The book also includes *Gnana*

It is difficult to reconstruct the history of Gnānānanda. He was very reserved about his past, and the information compiled by his devotees appears to be more hagiographical than historical. As mentioned by Abhishiktānanda, his devotees said that he was anywhere from 120 to 153 years old, and that he knew the poetess Auveyar whom they say lived twenty centuries before.[166] It is said that Gnānānanda was born in a Brahmin family, in Karnataka State. He was named Subrahmanyam. He left home at an early age and was a disciple of Swami Sivaratna Giri, of Jyotirmutt, one of the four mutts which tradition says was established Shankara himself.[167] Gnānānanda was initiated by his *guru* into the 'Giri' order of this mutt at age 39. Gnānānanda always put great emphasis on his lineage; in all documents, he recorded his name as "Paramahamsa Parivrajakacharya Varya Sri Gnānānanda Giri Swami, disciple of Paramahamsa Parivrajakacharya Varya Sri Sivaratnagiri Swami, belonging to the Kashmir Jyotir Mutt Peetam of the lineage of Adi Sankara Bhagavat Pada."[168]

It is also said that Gnānānanda spent many years at Gangotri, the source of the Ganges.[169] This may have influenced Abhishiktānanda, who later took a pilgrimage to Gangotri.

In 1944-45, Gnānānanda settled in the village Siddhalingamadam, 6 miles from Tirukoilur and 26 miles from Tiruvannamalai on the southern banks of the river Pennar. Gnānānanda was initially known as a medicine man. He was known as 'Vaidya Swami'; he treated his patients with herbs and *siddha* medicine. Gradually an ashram formed around him; this moved nearer to Tirukoilur in 1954; it became known as 'Sri Gnānānanda Tapovanam'. The name derives from the words *tapas* and *vanam*. *Tapas* means 'intense heat'. Derived meanings of *tapas* include references to ascetic practices such as zeal, fervour, and austerity. *Vana* (or *vanam* in Tamil) means "a wood or a forest." Tirukoilur is a city of temples, within view of the sacred mountain Arunāchala. The largest temple there is dedicated to Vishnu. It was also at Tirukoilur that the first three *Alvars*, or *Vaishnaivite* saints are said to have received their vision

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Inba Veli. This is a collection of letters, tape-recorded addresses by Gnānānanda, and sayings as recollected by disciples.

[166] *Guru,* pp. 25, 26.

[167] *Sadguru Gnānānanda*, p. 7. The establishment of the *mutts* by Shankara is questioned by scholars like Halbfass.

[168] *Sadguru Gnānānanda*, p. 9, ft. 1.

[169] *Sadguru Gnānānanda*, p. 10.

of the Lord. The town also has *Śaivite* temples, which are associated with the *Nayanmars*, the *Śaivite* saints of Tamil Nadu.

Gnānānanda was known for his proficiency in many languages including Tamil, Hindi, Malayalam, Kanarese and Telegu. He is also said to have had an extraordinary memory, being able to quote many verses in these languages. Some writings with which Gnānānanda is said to be familiar include the writings of the *Alvars*, the *Nayanmars*, the teachings of the *siddhas*, and the *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha.*[170]

Gnānānanda claimed to have known Ramaṇa Maharshi. He said that he visited him around 1910, when Ramaṇa was then a young boy practicing meditation in caves. He also said that he had talked to other Hindu sages, such as Sai Baba of Shirdi, Ramakrishna, Vivekānanda and Aurobindo. The writers of *Sadguru Gnānānanda* suggest that he was making the point that a *jñāni* like himself is beyond space and time. He was known as a *thrikalagnani*, one who can know triple time: time past, time present and the future. He is said to have been able to do astral travelling, telepathy and to see events unfolding elsewhere. He could also transform inanimate objects.[171] Abhishiktānanda seems to have been unaware of these powers attributed to Gnānānanda. He writes that Gnānānanda had nothing to do with a cheap spirituality:

> The life of Sri Gnānānanda, just like that of Sri Ramana Maharshi, exhibits no trace of anything extraordinary. No ecstasies, no *siddhis*, no esoteric teaching, no claim to have a mission, as is so often the case with so-called gurus; these corrupt their spiritual gifts which initially are often quite genuine, through an uncontrollable urge to dominate others and inflate their own ego […] The path which he teaches is basically one of total renunciation, whose final result is that no place is left for the ego to show itself.[172]

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[170] *Sadguru Gnānānanda*, pp. 56, 61, 94, 158.

[171] *Sadguru Gnānānanda* p. 51, 64, 67. These are all *siddhis*. See Swami Sivananda: *Tantra Yoga, Nada Yoga and Kriya Yoga* (India Divine Life Society, 1986), p. 8 for a list of *siddhi* powers.

[172] *Guru*, Preface p. xvi. See also *Letters,* p. 102 (F 19.3.56): "Outwardly there is nothing extraordinary about him. He does not read your thoughts, does no miracles: but when he speaks to you, it is as if what he says was coming out of your own heart." He is also seemingly unaware of Gnānānanda's expertise in astrology. *Sadguru Gnānānanda*, p. 59. In *Diary*, p. 29, he condemns astrology as unworthy of God to be developed and with "no other excuse than invincible ignorance."

T.M.P. Mahadevan was also acquainted with Gnānānanda, and visited his ashram several times. He refers to the "child-like nature" of Gnānānanda, and to his "beaming face and soft voice."[173]

It is said that, like other *siddhas*, Gnānānanda was also mystifying and unpredictable. He had ways of deflating one's ego. For example, he did not greet a manager who came; he also did not greet a Governor of a State for an hour, and he would sometimes treat disciples with cool indifference.[174]

2. Teachings of Gnānānanda

a) Self-enquiry

Gñānānanda's main teaching was v*ichara* or self-enquiry. This teaching was also referred to as *adhyatma yoga* (yoga concerning Self). Gnānānanda's devotees emphasize that this teaching was similar to that of Ramaṇa Maharshi. Like Ramaṇa, he was strongly influenced by the *Vivekacūdāmaṇi* and the *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha*.[175] They also say that this teaching is supported by classical Hinduism. They refer to the Katha Upanishad and to Shankara's teaching in his *Sutra Bāshya* as being similar to this method of self-enquiry.[176] Gnānānanda had a preference for certain Upanishads, particularly those in which the *mahavakyas* are embedded.[177] A poem of Gnānānanda refers to this self-enquiry:

> When I reach the depth of Thee,
> Oh, what will happen to me?
> Oh, what will happen to Thee?
> When I reach the depth of me,
> There is no longer Thee or me.[178]

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[173] *Sadguru Gnānānanda*, Preface by T.M.P. Mahadevan, p. xxiv.

[174] *Ibid.*pp. 44-48.

[175] *Sadguru Gnānānanda*, pp. 19, 35, 92, 94, 129, 130. 158, 279. *Guru* p. 84: "If you want to do yoga, begin by asking yourself who wants to do yoga."

[176] *Sadguru Gnānānanda*, p. 79 ft. 1 cites Ka. Up. 1.3.12: "The wise one having realized this Atman through the adhyatma yoga overcomes both elation and grief." It also cites Shankara's *Sutra Bāshya* 1.4.1. Adhyatma Yoga is a "concentration of the mind which has been withdrawn from the sense-objects". The reference by Shankara is said to be Ka. Up. 1.3.13.

[177] *Sadguru Gnānānanda*, p. 155.

[178] *Sadguru Gnānānanda*, p. 149.

In this self-enquiry, the seeker seeks that place where nothing but pure awareness remains. One must not only get at the source of the "I" where thought no longer exists, but one must see that no thought arises. Gnānānanda used to also recite the following verse with respect to the importance of rooting out the idea of oneself:

> There where nothing is,
> Everything in fact is.
> Penetrate this secret,
> And you will vanish from yourself,
> Then alone, in truth YOU ARE.[179]

Like Ramaṇa, Gnānānanda also liked to recite passages from the *Tayumanavar*. For example, he refers to the following in reference to the quest for the Self:

> There the thought (mind) was born and there the thought (mind) died and rose purer. All states exist there. There the duality of experiencing ego and Witnessing Self is transcended.[180]

b) Meditation/Yoga

Unlike Ramaṇa, Gnānānanda emphasized yogic meditation, or *dhyāna*. Whereas Ramaṇa warned that meditation could reinforce the ego of the person meditating[181] Gnānānanda insisted on silent meditation, or *dhyāna.* He said that this meditation is the one essential spiritual practice; other practices such as *tapas*, solitude, vigils, fasting, or poverty, are all secondary.[182] Gnānānanda said that one does not discuss the subject of meditation; one immerses oneself in it, giving up everything else. The meditation is on the spirit in the depth of the heart, the *guhā*. The

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[179] *Ibid.*

[180] *Sadguru Gnānānanda*, p. 280. See also p. 254. "Help me to cry a halt to this wandering of the mind."

[181] Appel à l'intériorité" (1970), *Intériorité,* p. 162. See also "Approach to the Upanishads", *The Further Shore*, p. 71, where he says that meditation is only at the psychological level, and that although ā*tman* can be found underlies all levels of being, it should not be tied down to any one level.

[182] *Guru* pp. 65, 66. *Tapas*, solitude, vigils, fasts and non-possession are secondary and have no direct connection with 'realization'.

key in meditation is the renunciation or annihilation of the mind. Gnānānanda was fond of saying, "Submit to me and I will strike down the mind."[183]

Gnānānanda says that the mind must be freed from all thought, and be lost in the ā*tman*. The seeker is torn away from all signs. There is to be no reading, no prayer, no *pūjā*, only sustained *dhyāna*. The *sādhāka* or seeker must eliminate thought, by being a witness to these thoughts and ceasing to give them volition (*sankalpa*).

In this meditation, *prānāyama* is important–the attention paid to inhalation and exhalation of breath. The source of the breath is the source of the "I".[184] The meditation is without thoughts, although *mantras* may be used, such as *soham* ("He is I").[185] To avoid being carried away by thought, one is to find out who thinks the thought. He compares it to diving for a coin. The ocean is the mind, *manas*. The waves are its *vritti*, incessant movement, the turmoil of our thoughts. The waves must be stilled in order to see where to dive. Once the water has become calm and limpid, it is child's play to find the coin.

c) Kashmir *Śaivism*

The lineage of Gnānānanda from Kashmir *Śaivism* is important in explaining the similarities to Kashmir Śaivism in much of Abhishiktānanda's thought. Panikkar refers to the influence of Kashmir *Śaivism* on Abhishiktānanda, but he does not appear to know that Gnānānanda may have been the source of at least some of this influence.[186] Even earlier, Monchanin had provided Abhishiktānanda with information about Kashmir *Śaivism*. Monchanin

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[183] *Sadguru Gnānānanda,* p. 100. Osborne reports that Ramana said the same thing. See Preface to *Teachings of Ramana Maharshi* (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1978), p. 12.

[184] *Guru*, p. 68: "There where the I springs up, springs up the breath."

[185] *Sadguru Gnānānanda*, p. 130. A comparison is made to Ramaṇa, who said that this is a key *mantra* for meditation in his *Upadesa Saram*.

[186] Panikkar places the influence much later in Abhishiktānanda's life–towards the end of his life. See *Diary*, Introduction, p. xxiii. He also says that Abhishiktānanda learned at the same time the positive value of *śakti*. We have already seen that A. Shastri mentioned *śakti* and *kundalini* to Abhishiktānanda. The first reference by Abhishiktānanda to Kashmir *Śaivism* pre-dates even his meeting with Gnānānanda. See *Diary*, p. 40, (1.6.52), April 13/52, where he refers to *Pratyabhijña* (a doctrine that teaches the recognition of Shiva in the soul). Early references to *śakti* include *Diary*, p. 58 (2.2.53): The Virgin is the *śakti* of Christ. *Diary*, p. 67(24.3.53): Mary as *Parā Śakti*. *Diary,* p. 80 (6.12.53): y*antras* [diagrams] filled with *śakti*, energy. *Diary*, p. 79 (5.12.53): *śakti* as *māyā*.

had corresponded with Lilian Silburn, the scholar who first explained Kashmir *Śaivism* for the West.[187]

In Kashmir *Śaivism*, the symbolism of the heart is central.[188] Kashmir *Śaivism* emphasizes the *Śvetāśvatara* Upanishad, which speaks of Rudra-Shiva as the Supreme Being, the great Self, seated in the Heart of creatures.[189] The transcendence of Shiva is ultimate in one's heart; the heart is thus the home of both the individual and the cosmic Self. The Heart of Shiva is not static; it is rather always in perpetual movement, a state of vibration, a continuous contracting and expanding. It is, paradoxically, a dynamic stillness. There is an emphasis on *śakti*, seen as a cosmically creative force that carries out the tasks of creation, maintenance and reabsorption of the universe. This power is also present in the body as the *kundalini* force. We are to use every means to grasp this force of *śakti* permeating the body, the mind, and the world, and to reintegrate this power into the non-dual.[190] It is the power is the Goddess, who is never separate from Shiva. *Śakti* drives the process of manifestation, or of emission of the entire universe from Shiva. This dynamic view of ultimate reality, together with the view of *Śakti,* is essential for Abhishiktānanda's non-monistic understanding of *advaita.*

Kashmir *Śaivism* also emphasizes esoteric *tantric* traditions. These traditions arose as a reaction against the Upanishadic emphasis on renunciation. *Tantric* practitioners try to reconcile

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[187] In a letter dated August 13, 1949, Monchanin refera Abhishiktānanda to a study by Renou and Silburn about the Vedic notion of Brahman. See *Abbé Monchanin: Lettres au Père Le Saux*, ed. Françoise Jacquin (Paris: Cerf, 1995). Some of Silburn's works were in Abhishiktānanda's possession at his death. Abhishiktānanda recommended to Bettina Bäumer the reading of Silburn's works (See *occasional Bulletin* #15, January, 1994, p. 20). In a November, 1949 letter to Abhishiktānanda, Monchanin shares his enthusiasm for the writings of Sūryanārāyana Sāstri, a professor at Madras. Sāstri gives a non-acosmic view of Shankara. Monchanin explicitly refers to terms including *Sivādvaita* and *pratyabhijña*. Monchanin again refers to Śastri in his letter to Abhishiktānanda of March, 1953.

[188] This description is taken from Paul Eduardo Muller-Ortega: *The Triadic Heart of Shiva* (Albany: State University of New York, 1989).

[189] This Upanishad dates from the 5th or 6th century B.C.E.

[190] Muller-Ortega, *op. cit.*, pp. 50, 51, 82. This power is centrifugal, emissional and expansive in one of its aspects. But it is also centripetal, absorptive and unitive. The centripetal motion is the *kundalini* energy that impels one back to the source and center of one's being. Abhinavagupta, one of the founders of Kashmir *Śaivism*, identifies this centripetal motion with the Goddess in the Heart, and with the Supreme Word, *Om*. In meditation, there is a doubling back of consciousness upon itself. This generates a sounding, a vibration, which is the *śakti.* This sound is also produced in the meeting between *guru* and disciple; the meeting produces a powerful vibratory sound from the depths of silence of the *guru's* consciousness. This silent sound is the sound-form of the Goddess.

the ascent to *mokśa* or liberation with the experience of joyful enjoyment of the world. This influence is evident in Gnānānanda:

> In our life there is in fact nothing that is profane. Nothing, no movement of our limbs, no activity of our senses, is untouched by sacredness which we bear in ourselves and which surrounds us.[191]

A tantric *jīvanmukta* (one-who-is-liberated-while-alive) has become a man-god, "a divinized being acting within the world rather than seeking to transcend it." By a *tantric sādhanā*, a journey of return, we unmask the presence of Shiva within ourselves, playing Shiva's own game of *līlā*. *Līlā* is the play of Shiva in creating and destroying the manifested world. In the return, we return to the unmanifested origin. The ultimate goal of Kashmir *Śaivism* is that of identity with Shiva.

Kashmir *Śaivism* is also notable for its emphasis on direct experience. The system of Abhinavagupta (a 10th century Kashmiri teacher) stresses direct experience over the more speculative activities of system-building and doctrinal argumentation. Gnānānanda refers to the importance of direct experience over conceptual knowledge. He makes the comparison to reading a railway timetable (conceptual know-ledge) and actually getting on the train.[192]

Kashmir *Śaivism* is suspicious of language; language has an empty or merely instrumental character. Gnānānanda advised a disciple not to waste time learning Sanskrit. He also advised not trying to give a name to the 'void' or *śūnya*, since by definition it is beyond all names.[193]

The influence of this Kashmir *Śaivism* is evident in many of Abhishiktānanda's writings. Abhishiktānanda makes a reference to the directness of the *advaitic* experience, and he relates it to *Śaivism*: "From my Shaivism, thanks to the Upanishads, I go straight to the goal."[194] It is an

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[191] *Guru*, p. 58.

[192] *Sadguru Gnānānanda*, p. 155.

[193] *Guru*, pp. 66, 67.

[194] *Diary,* p. 149 (11.4.56). The footnote says that by 'Shaivism' he does not mean a system like *Śaiva Siddhānta,* which is not *advaitin*, but that he means the religious and monastic environment at Tapovanam and Arunāchala. The footnote therefore misses the influence of Kashmir *Śaivism*.

"interior mystery that is not thinkable, not to be grasped"[195] Abhishiktānanda prays for Shiva to awaken within him:

> Sadā Shiva, awake within me! That was my "prayer" the other Friday at the *samādhi*. For in the depth of myself there is no other but You, not other but Myself.[196]

Abhishiktānanda also refers to the sound "OM". Although this is emphasized in all kinds of Hinduism, Kashmir *Śaivism* emphasizes this sound in relation to the depths of silence. Abhishiktānanda refers to it as "the last sound through which man still tries to say something about God when he has once and for all abandoned all words and all concepts conceived by men and before he has entered into definitive silence."[197] And in *The Mountain of the Lord*, he writes:

> The OM which breaks forth from the roar of the Ganges, from the rustling of leaves, from the twittering of the birds and echoes indefinitely across the sheer cliff faces, is the OM which wells up in the pilgrim's heart like an infinite echo repeating itself, increasing and finally merging into the primordial OM in the silence in which all is said.[198]

And, as in Kashmir *Śaivism*, Abhishiktānanda emphasizes *śakti* as inherent in each of us as our most elemental power:

> In fact, there is probably nowhere else in the world where the mystery of the Presence has been felt as intensely as it has been in India since the remotest Vedic times–and that as a supremely active presence, the whole sphere of the divine Shakti, which somewhat resembles the *shekinah* of Jewish tradition. It is a presence that is immanent in every being that has issued from the hands of the Creator…[199]

Abhishiktānanda speaks of "the awakening to being" as being equivalent to the awakening of *śakti* (the explosive uncoiling of the *kundalinī* according to the tradition). In this same entry in the *Diary,* Abhishiktānanda uses the phrase "ascent to the depth", the phrase that was used by the editor Panikkar as the title to the *Diary.*[200]

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[195] *Diary*, p. 142 (3.2.56). [*acintya, agrāhya*].

[196] *Diary*, p. 135 (4.1.56).

[197] *Guru*, p. 39.

[198] *The Mountain of the Lord*, p. 151.

[199] *Guru* p. 35.

[200] *Diary* p. 160, (12.11.160). See also *Diary* p. 209 (30.5.57).

Kashmir *Śaivism* emphasizes *śakti* as the female side of Shiva. Shiva is both male and female. Gnānānanda also refers to this. He says that the universe is sustained by twin eternal principles: Shiva and his *Śakti*.[201] Abhishiktānanda refers to this androgynous character of Shiva as illustrating nonduality. Shiva is neither man nor woman, not half man and half woman, not man plus woman. He says that this is symbolic of the mystery of the relation between God and ourselves that cannot be expressed on the basis of our present concepts.[202]

d) *Bhakti* and *Guru* Devotion

Gnānānanda emphasizes the importance of *bhakti* (devotion) to Vishnu, including Vishnu's *avatars* Rāma and Krishna. Gnānānanda says that only after the seeker has attained purity of mind through *karma*, and is psychically awakened by *bhakti* is he or she introduced to *jñāna*.[203] Abhishiktānanda says he never was able to participate in this worship of Vishnu; he could not identify with the depths of the subconscious from which these rituals issued.[204]

Unlike Ramaṇa, Gnānānanda emphasized devotion to himself as *guru*. This devotion is known as *guru bhakti*. According to Gnānānanda, one can attain realization only through the guidance and blessings of a *guru*. The *guru* is the one who by personal experience knows the path to the Real.[205] The *guru* and disciple exist only in relationship to one another. There is between them a non-dual reciprocity:

> Guru and disciple form a dyad, a pair whose two components call for each other and belong together. No more than the two poles (of a magnet) can they exist without being related to each other. On the way towards unity they are a dyad. In the ultimate realization they are a non-dual reciprocity.[206]

In the *guru* and student relationship, there is itself an *advaita*; they are not two:

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[201] *Sadguru Gnānānanda,* p. 298.

[202] *Diary*, p. 153 (72.7.56). *Sadguru Gnānānanda*, p. 142: Gnānānanda sometimes dressed as *Devi*, the Goddess.

[203] Gnānānanda said that a woman could also be a *jivanmukta. Sadguru Gnānānanda* p. 41. Footnote 1 on the same page refers to the *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha*, which says that a woman has an equal right to self knowledge and if she makes an effort she can realise the self even earlier than a man does.

[204] *Guru*, p. 16. Abhishiktānanda was not attracted to Hindu *bhakti* so much as *jñāna*. *Diary*, p. 59 (22.2.53): His needs as a *bhakta* were fulfilled by the Church. He did, however, participate in devotion to Shiva, the formless God of whom the highest worship is "simply to disappear in him and to be no more capable even of giving him a name."

[205] *Guru*, p. 11. See also *Diary*, p. 31 (3.4.52).

> In human encounters duality is still left intact. At their best we may say that a fusion takes place and that the two *become* one in love and desire; but in the meeting of guru and disciple there is not even a fusion, for we are in the sphere of the original non-duality.[207]

Abhishiktānanda says that Gnānānanda always distinguished between the outer *guru* (the *guru* in visible form, the *guru-mūrti*, the instrumental *guru* who shows the way), and the *advaita guru* "who is the very light which shines from the *ātman* when it is finally discovered." It is only this inner *guru* who can make one take the plunge into *advaita*. The true *guru* is 'yourself' within your own self.[208]

It seems that Gnānānanda later put more emphasis on himself as *guru*. In 1959, several years after Abhishiktānanda's visits, a statue of Gnānānanda (his *sila*, or *vigraha*) was made. It is a life-sized image of him, carved from a single black stone. It was installed in a niche in a wall of the hall at the ashram. Devotees coming to the ashram would make their offerings to it. Later it was installed in a small *mandapam* with four pillars. Gnānānanda would stand by it while his devotees performed *pūjā* to the image. Marriages were also solemnized in front of it. Seven years before his death (or *mahasamadhi*) in 1974, Gnānānanda also prepared a hexagonal pit with the characteristics of a *samādhi* (memorial to a saint). He laid great stress on the power that emanates from *samadhis*, such as that of Ragothama Swami, the *Madhwa* saint, whose *samādhi* was across the river from Tapovanam.

Gnānānanda's disciples believe that during his life Gnānānanda was a *jivanmukti* and that his *samādhi* today contains great powers. Prayers are said at Gnānānanda's *samadhi* today, and his devotees believe in his assurance "Wherever and whenever you think of me, I shall be with you."

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[206] *Guru*, p. 12.

[207] *Guru*, p. 12.

[208] *Guru*, p. 84. Abhishiktānanda was introduced to Gnānānanda by his friend Harold Rose. Rose was an Enlgish Roman Catholic. He had been a novice Buddhist in Ceylon from 1949-52 and was also disciple of a Sufi when Abhishiktānanda met him. *Lettres d'un sannyāsī chrétien à Joseph Lemarié*, p. 127 (4.3.55).

3. Time spent with Gnānānanda

Abhishiktānanda spent three days with Gnānānanda in December 1955. He speaks of this as an "overwhelming encounter". He says that for the first time he knew what India means by the term *guru*. "For the first time I understood *gurubhakti* and *guru-śakti* [devotion to the *guru*, power of the *guru*.][209]

A few months later, Abhishiktānanda stayed with Gnānānanda for three weeks. He lived in a Hindu-Brahmin-Shaivite setting. He sat on a tiger skin with Gnānānanda.[210] One night Abhishiktānanda spent all alone in the temple with the Shiva *linga*. There were songs and dances around the sacred flame. In the spring of that same year he went to another ashram of Gnānānanda, where he stayed for three days.[211]

4. The influence of Gnānānanda on Abhishiktānanda

Abhishiktānanda believed that his meeting with Gnānānanda was "providential".[212] He believed that this meeting fulfilled at a higher level the meeting that he had had with Mehta in Bombay. Like Mehta, Gnānānanda wanted Abhishiktānanda to meditate without thoughts, leaving aside not only all distractions and all useless conversation but even all reading. Abhishiktānanda compared his meeting with Gnānānanda to a meeting with Christ: "How mysterious that Christ can take for a Christian the form of a Shaivite *guru*!"[213]

Although Abhishiktānanda had initially gone to Tapovanam merely out of curiosity, the few words that Gnānānanda spoke to him went right to his heart, uncovering depths he had never suspected. He says that he learned nothing new at the level of words or ideas; but a communication beyond words had been established between them at the deepest level in each of them. It seemed to him that everything that Gnānānanda was saying to him was welling up directly from the inmost recesses of his own heart.[214] Although Gnānānanda never initiated him

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[209] *Letters*, p. 87 (L, 24.12.55) and *Diary*, p. 131 (25.12.55).

[210] *Letters*, p. 91 (19.3.56).

[211] *Letters,* p. 94 (MT, 24.6.56).

[212] *Diary*, p. 139 (14.1.66).

[213] *Letters*, p. 89 (L.20.1.56).

[214] *Guru*, p. 9.

in a formal *dīkshā*, Abhishiktānanda considered Gnānānanda to be his *guru*, and was willing to give himself over completely to him.[215] He says, "If that man were to ask me tomorrow to set out on the roads naked and silent like Sadāshiva *Brahman*, I would be unable to refuse."[216] Abhishiktānanda found radiant peace, equability, and equanimity manifesting in Gnānānanda.[217] He says,

> You felt that for him all distinction, *bheda*, was annulled and had vanished. In each disciple it was as if he directly perceived his truest personality, the Self alone, the *ātman*.[218]

Abhishiktānanda described the experience of being face to face with a *guru* with the experience of being face to face with 'oneself' in the most secret corner, with all pretence gone. The meeting with the *guru* is the decisive turning point in one's life. But it is a meeting that can only take place when one has gone beyond the level of sense and intellect. What the *guru* says springs from the very heart of the disciple. It is not that another person is speaking to him. It is not a question of receiving from outside oneself new thoughts that are transmitted through the senses. When the vibrations of the master's voice reach the disciple's ear and the master's eyes look deep into his then from the very depths of his being, from the newly discovered cave of his heart, thoughts well up which reveal him to himself.

Abhishiktānanda followed *gurubhakti*. He would prostrate himself before Gnānānanda:

> My guru is the first man before whom I have been willing to prostrate. I now do it in fine style; a controlled fall to the ground, with arms extended, touching the ground first with the ears, then with the forehead; then half rising, you do it again, then you stand up and touch the master's feet with your hands, which are then brought up to the eyes.[219]

It is interesting that one of the first questions that Abhishiktānanda asked Gnānānanda was whether his position concerning supreme reality was *dvaita* or *advaita*. Does any difference remain between God and creatures? Gnānānanda's answer was, "What is the use of such questions? The answer is within you." Abhishiktānanda also asked whether Gnānānanda

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[215] *Letters*, p. 87 (L. 24.12.55).

[216] *Letters*, p. 90 (L, 14.3.56).

[217] *Diary*, p. 139 (14.1.56).

[218] *Guru*, p. 83.

performed rites of initiation. The answer was, "Initiations–what is the use of them? Either the disciple is not ready, in which case the so-called initiation is no more than empty words; or else the disciple is ready and then neither words nor signs are necessary."[220]

E. Buddhist Influences

As already mentioned, Abhishiktānanda was introduced to the works of D.T. Suzuki by a disciple of Ramaṇa in 1949. He read the available books "eagerly".[221] He also refers to writings by Alan Watts, another popularizer of Zen for the West.[222]

The reading of Buddhist sources in Ramaṇa*'s ashram* must have contributed to Abhishiktānanda's view that the *advaitic* experience is similar to the enlightenment experience or *satori* of Zen Buddhism.[223] For Abhishiktānanda, Hindu *advaita* and Zen Buddhism speak of the same *advaitic* experience.[224] He refers to the enlightenment that he seeks as *satori*.[225] He refers to the meaning of *buddha* as 'awakening'.[226] This awakening is something beyond

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[219] *Letters*, p. 91 (MT 25.3.56).

[220] *Guru*, p. 8.

[221] This appears to have included D.T. Suzuki: *Essays in Zen Buddhism*. See *Intériorité*, p. 44, ft. 9. The first series of these essays by Suzuki was first published in 1949; the second series was already available in 1950.

[222] *Diary*, p. 39 (1.6.52): "Christ left us his own '*genius*', that is, his Spirit." In *Intériorité,* p. 46, ft. 14, the editor J. Dupuis cites the following quotation regarding the oneness of God, included in Alan Watts: *Behold the Spirit* (New York, 1947). "A oneness indeed which is actually more real and intimate than what we normally would describe as identification." At p. 138, Watts says that we need some terms other than pantheistic monism or theistic dualism if there is to be a vital relationship between mysticism and Christian theology. It is clear that Abhishiktānanda read this book, since he recommended it to Fr. Lemarié. *Lettres d'un sannyāsī chrétien à Joseph Lemarié*, p. 58 (11.6.52).

[223] *Intériorité*, p. 43. He cites the familiar "I collect wood, I carry water" referred to in Suzuki's *Essays on Zen*:

> *O la chose merveilleuse!*
> *O la chose surnaturelle!*
> *O la chose miraculeuse!*
> *Je ramasse du bois et je tire de l'eau.*

[224] *Diary,* p. 140 (21.1.56).

[225] *Diary*, p. 49, (15.7.49). "*Satori* is attained when I have realized that the centre is as truly everywhere as it is in "myself." And God himself is not this centre, for God is without place [*a-deśa*], as he is without time [*a-kāla*]; this God is as really in his *lilas* as in himself, if we venture to make the distinction."

[226] *Intériorité*, p. 50.

concepts. Abhishiktānanda uses the Buddhist raft analogy to explain how concepts are useful but one must leave them behind.[227] He compares the awakening of Buddha to that of Jesus.[228]

In 1952, while he was meditating in the cave, Abhishiktānanda continued to think about parallels with Buddhism:

> Passing beyond joy is one of the degrees of Buddhist , meditation [*dhyāna*]. When "my" joy becomes full, it has ceased to be mine, and that is precisely why it is full, it is the joy, the Peace, primordial, essential, the very same as God enjoys in himself, in "me", in every being…[229]

At this time, Abhishiktānanda speaks of his baptism as a vow of *bodhisattva*, and of his commitment to live "every minute *Zen*".[230]

In March 1953 Abhishiktānanda writes:

> Yesterday evening I finally understood the Buddhist position of *anatman*, (unsubstantiality of the self). It is not myself who encounters the Real in the depths of my self. My feelings just as my thought are powerless. It is only in [the eclipse] of my awareness of myself that there appears that awareness of the Self. It is not myself who attains to the Depths, it is the Depth itself which reveals itself in the disappearance of this (peripheral) self.[231]

It is interesting that Monchanin was also interested in Buddhism. This interest began as an adolescent, when Monchanin's father gave him a copy of the *Legend of the Buddha*.[232] Monchanin even gave lectures on Buddhism.[233] Abhishiktānanda said this interest was more due to the fact that Buddhism had a monastic life, unlike the life of the Hindu monk.[234]

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[227] *Diary* p. 69 (30.3.53). and p. 169 (22.11.56).

[228] *Diary*, p. 156 (6.11.56).

[229] *Diary*, p. 48 (15.7.52).

[230] *Diary,* pp. 49, 50 (17.7.52 and 21.7.52).

[231] March/53 letter to Odette Baumer-Despeigne: "The Spiritual Way of Henri Le Saux Swami Abhishiktānanda", *Bulletin of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue*, 1993, vol. 48, Oct., p. 20.

[232] *Jules Monchanin: Regards croisés d'Occident et d'Orient* (Lyon: Profac-Credic, 1997), pp. 20, 172

[233] In 1949, Monchanin gave a talk in Pondicherry on "The Absolute according to Buddhism". *Abbé Monchanin: Lettres au Père Le Saux*< ed. Françoise Jacquin(Paris: Cerf, 1995), p. 55.

[234] *Diary* p. 114, (8.8.55). This remark by Abhishiktānanda seems an oversimplification, especially in view of the fact that Monchanin apparently had less interest in monasticism than he did.

Gnānānanda also taught Abhishiktānanda to think about Buddhism and Hindu *advaita* as complementary:

> Later on, when Vanya [Abhishiktānanda] recalled this conversation, he admitted that he had never previously understood as he then did, the Buddha's teaching about the need for our meditation to be successively purified. We have to leave behind the place of thinking, then that of joy, then that of peace; next, in more advanced meditations, we have to leave behind in their turn all the negations which have acted as supports in leaving behind one stage after another, until we have passed beyond every affirmation and equally every negation, and have entered the total silence, in which one who has reached so far is no longer aware of being silent–since he has passed into the *ākāsha* of the heart, the 'super-space', which can no longer be circumscribed or localized.[235]

Other devotees of Gnānānanda also associated him with Buddhist teachings. Gnānānanda is said to have visited many Buddhist viharas.[236] At times he gave questions similar to Zen *koans.*[237] Gnānānanda's teaching is also reminiscent of Buddhism in stressing that attachment is the root cause of every experience, good as well as bad.[238] This view is also expressed by Abhishiktānanda, who says,

> What impedes the flash [of enlightenment] is that the spirit is clogged with all kinds of desires and mental conceptions–a truth which the Buddha pressed upon mankind with unequalled force.[239]

In 1956, Abhishiktānanda tried meditating using the Buddhist mantra, *OM mani padme OM*. He interpreted it as meaning "everything is *padma*." He found it too complicated as a *mantra* "at present".[240]

In 1972, he says that Buddhism was needed to correct the over-conceptualization in the later Upanishads in Hinduism:

> Later, people want to discuss and argue (Śvetāśvara, Maitrī), and it needed the stern application of the Buddha's rod to call them to order.[241]

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[235] *Guru*, p. 67.

[236] *Sadguru* p. 10.

[237] *Sadguru* p. 199.

[238] *Sadguru*, p. 122. Of course there are also many Hindu sources which stress the importance of avoiding desire and acting without attachment.

[239] "Approach to the Upanishads", *The Further Shore*, p. 71.

[240] *Diary* p. 156 (7.11.56). But see *Diary*, p. 170 (23.11.56).

For Abhishiktānanda, the Maitri Upanishad represents the end of the great age of the Upanishads. The earliest Upanishads, the *Bṛihadāraṇyaka* and the *Chāndogya*, are the ones which "most faithfully express Upanishadic thought in its radical purity." They imply a "stripping off of everything 'religious'. But the *Kaṭha* and the *Maitrī* Upanishads represent a "falling back" on discursive thought. The Buddha reinstated the value of experience as supreme, although he developed this intuition by using concepts very different from those used by the Upanishads:

> For instance, in place of the concept of *sarvam*, *pūrnam*, the All, Fullness, Totality–which had not been able to prevent that experience from being analysed to death–he offered instead that of *śūnya*, the void, vacancy. He himself maintained and required others to maintain silence on all questions termed transcendental; but one knows well how the silence of the Buddha came to be expounded by countless commentaries…[242]

Abhishiktānanda says that the mission of the Buddha was to express in "drastically negative" terms his intuition *éblouissante* of the inaccessibility of the mystery of Being.[243]

In 1971, Abhishiktānanda met a Japanese Dominican, Fr. Oshida.[244] Oshida had an ashram in Japan called 'Takamori' ("the cave of divine silence"). Oshida gave a brief course of *zazen* at Jyoytiniketan, which Abhishiktānanda attended. Later, Abhishiktānanda took him to Hardwar, Rishikesh and Delhi. Abhishiktānanda comments:

> The same theological problems and paradoxes (?) as we have here. Freed from all formulas, he is 'existentially' Christian at a depth so much greater than that which is reached by rites and symbols. But when it is a question of defining how and why he is Christian, it is impossible capture this reality—all explanations are elusive. Only he who has reached the 'depth' can understand one who speaks

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[241] *Letters* p. 271 (MC, 13.6.72).

[242] "Approach to the Upanishads", *The Further Shore* pp. 77, 78. This view of the Upanishads may derive to some extent from Olivier Lacombe. See his article "Orient et Occident". *Études Carmélitaines*, April/1931, vol. 16, pp. 133-159. At p. 147 he speaks of the time of the Upanishads, when Indian spirituality "se pétrit". In *L'Absolu Selon le Vedanta*, he says at p. 9 that Shankara knew only the *Bṛihadāraṇyaka, Chāndogya, Taittirīya, Kashitaki* and *Kena* Upanishads.

[243] *Intériorité*, p. 178.

[244] Oshida has written about this meeting. See "God's Harpstring", Abhishiktānanda Society Occasional *Bulletin* (6.12.82).

> from the 'depth'. A smile, a freedom, which those who do not know completely misunderstand.[245]

He refers to Fr. Oshida as living his ancestral Zen and his Christian faith "in a marvellous harmony and with total freedom in the Spirit an intensely Christian heart in a Buddhist psyche."[246]

Towards the end of his life, Abhishiktānanda speaks about Buddhism in a letter to Marc Chaduc, his disciple:

> It is good that you should have had this experience of Buddhism. Provided that you do not become attached even in that to the form of the without-form! For me everything is in the Upanishads. But the Buddha's radically purified training is a marvellous aid for getting inside them. It is a radical deliverance from our attempts to think […] later we have to be able to recognize the value of the *namarupa* […] We find ourselves once more Christian, Hindu, Buddhist.[247]

Abhishiktānanda makes frequent reference to Buddhism in several of his writings. The awakening of Śakyamuni is referred to in numerous entries in the *Diary* as late as 1973. [248] He refers to the Ten Oxherding Pictures of Zen, and other references to Zen. [249] He refers to the value of *koans*. [250] He refers to *śūnyata*[251] and to *satori*. [252] Because of these numerous references, we must make reference to Buddhist explanations in later chapters. At this point, it must be emphasized that Abhishiktānanda's use of Buddhism is in the context of its similarity with *advaita*. Whether or not his interpretation of Buddhist doctrines like *satori*, *śūnyatā* or *anātman* are correct remains to be investigated.

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[245] *Letters* p. 273 (OB, 30.1.71).

[246] Letter to Fr. J. Lemarié, 1971, cited in Odette Baumer-Despeigne: "The Spiritual Journey of Henri Le Saux-Abhishiktānanda", *Cistercian Studies* 1983, vol. 4, p. 323.

[247] *Letters*, p. 284 (MC, 26.1.73).

[248] *Diary*, p. 145 (5.3.56), p. 169 (22.11.56), p. 270 (12.4.64), p. 305 (12.1.69), p. 378 (21.4.73).

[249] *Diary* p. 247 (13.11.62); p. 288 (11.11.66); p. 310 (14.1.310): "the incompleteness of Zen"; He had met with representatives of Zen who maintain necessity of series of enlightenments; p. 323 (24.11.70); p. 367 (3.1.73): *zazen*. *Letters*, p. 187 (RP, 29.10.66); p. 238 (M,13.11.70).

[250] *Guru*, Preface, p. xv.

[251] *Diary*, p. 46 (12.6.52); p. 52 (2.8.52); p. 68 (39.3.53); p. 81 (6.12.53).

[252] *Diary*, p. 49. "*Satori* [enlightenment] is attained when I have realized that the centre is as truly everywhere as it is in "myself." And God himself is not this centre, for God is without place [*a-deśa*], as he is without time [*a-kāla*]' this God is as really in his *lilas* as in himself, if we venture to make the distinction." Enlightenment is *buddhatvam*, *satori is a* "passing beyond".

I have already mentioned that Abhishiktānanda eagerly read the writings by D.T. Suzuki. It should be noted that Suzuki's approach, as well as that of other popularizers of Zen for the West, such as Blofeld and Watts, has been criticized by some writers as giving a romantic spin to Zen teaching. Dale S. Wright says that the very idea of Zen enlightenment put forward by these writers is based on a Western romanticism.[253] Wright says that this romantic view has become the orthodox view of Zen–that Zen mind is "pure experience", the immediate, direct apprehension of the objective world as it is on its own prior to the subjective mediation of language and thought. It is the Eternal Now, a timeless reality. But Wright says that this view is contrary to the texts. Wright suggests not making the move to a timeless, transcendental experience. For him, all human experience is finite, historical and open to transformation. Temporality and experience are inseparable. Even the experience of timelessness occurs in time. Wright says that theologies of eternity share the experience that temporalized life is pain and that the divine is "Wholly Other" than this.

But Wright's analysis needs to be looked at more closely. He is insufficiently critical of the model that he himself uses (the Hermeneutic Model), and of his reliance on Kant for his emphasis on finitude. Wright also does not acknowledge the extent to which his view of Zen changes Zen's own interpretation of itself. For example, he explains the Zen doctrine that Zen is "beyond transmission" in a way that is the reverse of Zen understanding. The usual meaning is that Zen cannot be taught by words; rather, an enlightened master is needed to show the way by "mind-to-mind transmission". But Wright reverses this and says that the historical lineage of the Zen masters was the basis for the doctrine. In other words, the doctrine was necessary to maintain the tradition that had developed. The very idea of enlightenment is changed. It is no longer the repeating of the Buddha's experience, or of anyone else's experience. The "going beyond" of Zen is a historical transcendence; it remains in the world and does not repeat or replicate someone else's experience. What remains of enlightenment is the experience of the absence or void as "mystery". Lacking secure and solid ground, the freedom and contingency of finite existence can be experienced.[254]

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[253] Dale S. Wright: *Philosophical Meditations on Zen Buddhism* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 181.

[254] *Ibid*., p. 168.

If these are the only two possibilities: a timeless, secure ground versus a completely contingent and utterly finite experience, then it is clear that Abhishiktānanda chose the first. And it may be that the writings of D.T. Suzuki influenced him to express his ideas in romantic terms. But the Yogic Model, discussed in the chapter on Methodology, can incorporate some of the insights of Wright while maintaining a view of transcendence.

F. Abhishiktānanda's Disciple Marc Chaduc

1. *Guru*/Disciple relationship

Marc Chaduc was a young French seminarian who came to India with the specific purpose to learn from Abhishiktānanda. They started corresponding in May 1969, and they met in October 1971. Their first few days were spent in ceaseless conversation. Chaduc says,

> By the second evening Fr. Le Saux (Henri) had 'volatilized' all my questions. He plunges (me) into the Source, beyond *logos* [the level of reasoning].[255]

It may seem strange that a disciple was himself an influence on Abhishiktānanda. But in teaching Chaduc, Abhishiktānanda learned what it was like to be a *guru* to someone else:

> With him [Marc] and two young Hindus I experience from the other end what the *guru* is. It is really the *chela* (disciple) who *makes* the *guru*, and you have to have lived it, in order to grasp this relationship 'beyond words (…) Frightening, and what a responsibility. As I have often written, I think that a theology that goes further ought not to be written down, for fear of being misunderstood and misleading people; it can only be left to be divined from spoken words.[256]

Abhishiktānanda believed that the Upanishadic teaching is a secret which cannot be written down and is only properly passed on by means of the secret communication of *guru* to disciple.[257] The student must be prepared for the *advaitic* experience. Otherwise, the student will only hear words, which he or she would interpret wrongly, at the level of the mind.[258] There

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[255] *Letters*, p. 255 (L.16.11.71).

[256] *Letters*, p. 259 (OB 7.1.72). The two young Hindus are Ramesh Srivastava and Lalit Sharma. Abhishiktānanda first met them in 1966, but told them they were not yet ready to become disciples. *Letters*, p. 186 (L, 8.10.66).

[257] *Letters*, p. 267 (OB 22.5.72). This is very similar to the "mind-to-mind transmission" in Zen Buddhism.

[258] *Letters*, p. 177 (AMS 29.1.66).

is a danger of a false *advaita* that is thought and not experienced. The Vedantin secret must not be revealed except to the competent:

> The Vedantin secret should however remain closed and only be revealed to the *adhikārī* [competent, one who is authorized, initiated], otherwise people would take it for the stupid position of the Rāmakrishna Mission and other Vedantin pedants–or else for the secularism that Vivekānanda often implies. […] However there comes a time when…one should be able to accept [one's] the *anubhava* and one should dare to awaken to it those who are ready, whatever may be the anguish and the heartbreak.[259]

If the *guru* and disciple are each 'competent', the *guru*'s word "is like an arrow that goes straight to the disciple's heart and at once causes the spring to flow."[260] But the *guru* does not refer to his own experience:

> …the guru who refers to his *own* experience shows by that very fact that he has missed *the* experience. Whoever has not disappeared in the light cannot testify to the light[261]

Abhishiktānanda and Chaduc had several retreats together. When not together, they wrote each other letters every day. As will be discussed in Chapter IV, it was in one of these retreats that Abhishiktānanda believed that he had finally attained to the *advaitic* experience.

A most unfortunate result of the relationship between Abhishiktānanda and Marc Chaduc was the destruction of much of Abhishiktānanda's *Diary*. Abhishiktānanda gave Chaduc his *Diary* entries from November 18, 1966, for him to do with as he liked. Chaduc copied excerpts from the Diary, and then threw away the original. There appears no reason to believe that the entries were not copied correctly; there are sufficient parallels in letters written by Abhishiktānanda from the same period. But much of the context of these published Diary entries is missing, as well as details of the relationship between Abhishiktānanda and Chaduc. Chaduc himself wrote a personal diary for this period of their time together. That diary is in the possession of Madame Odette Baumer-Despeigne; she does not allow anyone else to see it. One can only speculate as to what is in this diary, and what the reasons may be for suppressing it.

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[259] *Diary*, pp. 322, 323 (18.11.70).

[260] "Approach to the Upanishads", *Further Shore*, p. 71.

[261] *Letters*, p. 238 (M, .13.11.70). He says that the Christian guru is never anything but the manifestation of the Lord.

Only a very few excerpts from Chaduc's journal have been published by Odette Baumer-Despeigne.[262] These excerpts will be discussed in the next chapter, where I will explore descriptions of Abhishiktānanda's experience. From other information, we know that Chaduc could be cruel in what he said, and could say the most amazing things to Abhishiktānanda.[263] It seems that Chaduc challenged Abhishiktānanda to be faithful to his own writings. As a result, Abhishiktānanda turned more towards the acosmic model of a monk or *sannyāsī*.

2. The *dīkshā* of Marc Chaduc

Marc Chaduc was initiated as a *sannyāsī* in a joint ceremony performed both by Abhishiktānanda and by a Hindu, Swami Chidananda. Abhishiktānanda writes:

> The rite was reduced to its essentials, without any Hindu reference. Chidananda was especially happy. He told me that he had rarely been as much satisfied after giving *sannyasa*.[264]

Prior to the *dīkshā*, Chaduc fasted. The night was devoted to reading the Bible and Upanishads. At 4 a.m. the Eucharist was celebrated. The stone plate and cup used in the Eucharist were later thrown into the Ganges, for "the real *sannyas* is the end of all signs."[265]

Abhishiktānanda describes the ceremony:

> Very simple ceremony, but it was simply too beautiful. The three of us were simply radiant. Deep in the Ganga he pronounced the old formula of renunciation. I join him; he plunges into (the) water; I raise him up, and we sing our favourite *mantras* to the *Purusha*. He discards all his clothes in (the) water, and I receive him as from the maternal womb. We envelop him in the fire-coloured dress. We communicate to him the *mahavakyas*, and I give him the 'envoi': "Go to where is no return…" And immediately he went on, his begging bowl in hand, to I do not know where…[266]

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[262] Odette Baumer-Despeigne: "The Spiritual Way of Henri Le Saux Swami Abhishiktānanda", *Bulletin of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue*, 1993, vol. 48, Oct.

[263] Conversation between Bäumer and Visvanathan, Susan Visvanathan, *An Ethnography of Mysticism: The Narratives of Abhishiktānanda, A French Monk in India* (Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1998). *op. cit.* p. 98.

[264] *Letters*, p. 302 (MR, 3.7.73).

[265] *Ibid*.

[266] *Letters*, p. 302 (MR, 3.7.73).

Abhishiktānanda regarded the *dīkshā* as more than a simple sign; he referred to it as a symbol in the language of Jung, in religious terms, a mystery.[267] As a *sannyāsī,* Chaduc was not-born. He received the name *Ajatananda*, meaning 'bliss of the not-born'. He had achieved the realm beyond time. But the *dīkshā* would "… fix in time an ending of time, to which those who locate themselves in time and space may refer."[268]

Abhishiktānanda envied Chaduc's courage.[269] He says that Chaduc showed what he should have had the courage to do earlier, "putting into practice the beautiful things I wrote. I am too much a 'litterateur', as M. [Monchanin] used to tell me."[270]

After the death of Abhishiktānanda, Chaduc returned to France for a year for family reasons. He returned to India, and in January 1975, he settled in a hut for a ten year period of silence (*mauna*). The hut had been purchased by the Sivānanda ashram. In April, 1977, Chaduc disappeared. His glasses were found in his hut, but there was no sign of him. It is believed that Chaduc may have ended his own life by offering himself to the Ganges in the rite of *jala-samādh*i allowing his body to be carried away by the Ganges in order to release his *ātman*.[271]

G. Other Important Influences

1. Raimon Panikkar

As stated in Chapter II, the comparative philosophy of J.L. Mehta is relied on in this thesis. Of interest here is the fact that Panikkar taught at some of the same universities as J.L.

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[267] *Letters*, p. 313 (JS, 20.9.73).

[268] *Letters*, p. 296 (MC, 24.4.73).

[269] *Letters*, p. 303 (MT, 6.7.73).

[270] *Letters*, p. 302 (MR, 3.7.73).

[271] Chaduc was strongly influenced by Swami Ram Tirth, who was rumoured to have ended his own life this way. Another disciple of Abhishiktānanda also disappeared–Sister Térèse. She was from the Carmel of Lisieux in France. She moved to India, and stayed first at the Carmel of Pondicherry. Abhishiktānanda met her in September 1965. He also visited her at Rishikesh and Jyotiniketan. Abhishiktānanda corresponded with her frequently. About the same time that Marc arrived in India, Sister Térèse received permission to lead the life of a hermit in the Himalayas, and Abhishiktānanda found a place for her to stay in Hardwar. She disappeared from her hut in 1976. *Diary* p. xxviii; *Letters* p. 255.

Mehta, and he corresponded with Mehta.[272] Panikkar has described his life as being Christian, Hindu, and Buddhist.[273]

Panikkar was also a long time friend of Abhishiktānanda. Abhishiktānanda first met Panikkar in 1957.[274] He stayed with him the last half of August 1957. Panikkar at that time was a professor at Kashi Hindu University. After that, Abhishiktānanda had many visits with Panikkar. They had many long talks together, and they shared their thoughts for more than ten years.[275] Frequently, they would spend Christmas together. Once they took a three-week pilgrimage together to Gangotri in the Himalayas. They spent several weeks together at Varanasi, and they had planned to spend another month there together in 1973.[276] After Abhishiktānanda's death, Panikkar edited Abhishiktānanda's *Diary* for publication. Panikkar also wrote an article about Abhishiktānanda that will be referred to in this thesis.[277]

It is often difficult to tell who influenced whom.[278] Like Abhishiktānanda, Panikkar saw *advaita* as non-monistic. Panikkar says that a*dvaita* opposes simultaneously both pure monism and pure dualism. It also transcends as well as embodies both the extremes.[279]

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[272] Panikkar met Mehta in 1954, when they were both at Banaras Hindu University. Mehta was at first prejudiced against him as a priest. See Raimon Panikkar's Introduction to *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, ed. William J. Jackson, (New York: Brill, 1992), p. xiv.

[273] See Joseph Prabhu, ed. *The Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1996), p. 5.

[274] *Letters*, p. 104 (L.27.5.57).

[275] Comment by James Stuart. *Letters*, p. 216.

[276] They spent a week together in December 1957 and again in December 1958. Panikkar was then absent from India for 4 years. On his return, they met in March, May-June (3 week pilgrimage to Gangotri), October and December of 1964. In January 1965, they both climbed to the top of Arunāchala to celebrate a Christian liturgy. In December 1965, Abhishiktānanda spent three weeks at Varanasi with Panikkar. They both attended a seminar in 1968. They met in Varanasi in the fall of 1968. In 1970 Panikkar was in Europe. They both attended a seminar in Nagpur in October 1971. They had planned to spend a month together at Varanasi in 1973. This never took place.

[277] Raimundo Panikkar: "A Letter to Abhishiktānanda" *Studies in Formative Spirituality* (Pittsburgh, Duquesne University) 3 (1982), n. 3, 429-51.

[278] Abhishiktānanda's influence has been seen in Panikkar's *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1973) and *The Intra-Religious Dialogue* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978). See Wayne Teasdale: "Abhishiktānanda's Mystical Intuition of the Trinity*", Cistercian Studies*, 1983, No. 1, pp. 59-75), p. 74. Abhishiktānanda himself said that he would not have the impertinence to call Panikkar his disciple; he was too intelligent for that. But Abhishiktānanda says that there was a mutual listening and osmosis. *Lettres d'un sannyāsī chrétien à Joseph Lemarié*, p. 310 (30.12.64).

[279] R. Panikkar: *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics,* 281.

One clear influence by Panikkar on Abhishiktānanda is his book *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*.[280] Abhishiktānanda read this book and was very impressed by it. At the time, Abhishiktānanda was also fearful of it, because of its statement of the "provisional truth" of Christianity. He wrote to Panikkar:

> You have that terrible phrase on p. 63 [of *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*] that Christianity is 'provisional', only of this world.[281]

This view, that Christianity is only provisional, was later a position that Abhishiktānanda adopted for himself.[282]

One crucial influence of Panikkar is therefore with respect to Abhishiktānanda's changing views of religious pluralism. In Chapter II, I have referred to Abhishiktānanda's view that religions, myths and archetypes are culturally conditioned, and that we need to go beyond them. In a letter to Panikkar, Abhishiktānanda acknowledges that this means that that the so-called Christian approach to the 'mystery' is just one of the approaches.[283] It is one of the marvellous dreams that are fashioned in order to express the drive of our *psyche*. This psychic drive is expressed in culturally conditioned symbols: "…no deep 'drive' can be expressed without symbols. There is no religion without a culture."[284]

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[280] Raimon Panikkar: *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1964).

[281] *Letters*, p. 187 (29.10.66). *Diary*, p. 286 (24.10.66). "R.P. [Panikkar] has written this incredible line about Christianity: "provisional, just for the time being," *Unknown Christ*, p. 63. And so? It is Vedānta that holds the key to eternity. The Church then is only for the not-risen ones, for those who do not have the experience of the *asmi* [I am]."

[282] *Letters*, p. 178 (L.22.9.63); *Diary* p. 286 (24.10.66); citation from *Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1981, first published 1964) p. 63.

[283] *Diary*, p. 282 (RP, 23.12.72). James Stuart says that this view appears to have been at least partly triggered by Panikkar's essay on the "Supername": "Salvation in Christ: Concreteness and Universality: the Supername", Jerusalem: Ecumenical Institute for Advanced Theological Studies, 1972). A *Diary* entry from 1971 refers to Panikkar's view that every theological problem arises out of a particular faith. (11.12.71). See also *Diary*, p. 371 (2.2.73), where Abhishiktānanda specifically refers to Panikkar's idea of the Supername.

[284] *Letters*, p. 285 (MC, 30.1.73).

2. Chidananda

Swami Chidananda was the *Acharya* at Sivānanda Ashram, Rishikesh, and the successor to Swami Sivānanda.[285] He was born as Sridhar Rao in 1916, the son of a prosperous *Zamindar* (landowner). He graduated in 1938 from Loyola College. His education at this Christian college is significant, because Chidananda later makes many parallels between Christianity and Hinduism.[286] He joined Sivānanda's ashram in 1943, and was initiated in 1949. In 1959, he made a three-year tour to America, as the representative of the Divine Life Society. He made another global tour in 1968.

Abhishiktānanda often stayed at the Sivānanda Ashram. His first mention of Chidananda is in 1965. He considered Chidananda to be "a truly spiritual man" whose friendship he greatly valued.[287]

Chidananda provided the Hindu side to the joint initiation or *dīkshā* of Marc Chaduc. Although Abhishiktānanda had visited the ashram many times, Chaduc was responsible for bringing Abhishiktānanda and Chidananda together. Chidananda has been interviewed by Sister Vandana about this meeting with Abhishiktānanda. He said of Abhishiktānanda,

> It is something very wonderful and very mysterious, the way in which we both just absolutely went into a state of at-one-ment, we saw each other the very first time. (I had heard of him in 1969 in Lyons.) It was as though we had known each other always–a perfect and absolute empathy[…] I could see from his face that an inner light had sparked in him.[288]

Chidananda says that Chaduc and Abhishiktānanda

> …were both imbued with the purest spirit of highest Vedanta. They had both gone into the realms of the Unknown, the Undefinable, the Transcendental; not

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[285] The ashram is run by the Divine Life Society. Among the 300 books that Sivānanda is said to have written are his books *Kundalini Yoga* (Divine Light Society, 1971) and *Tantra Yoga, Nada Yoga and Kriya Yoga* (India Divine Life Society, 1986).

[286] See the Website at http://www.SivanandaDlshq.org/saints/chida.htm.

[287] *Letters*, p. 173 (AMS, 12.7.65). Abhishiktānanda heard of the Sivānanda ashram at least as early as 1955 when he was at Gnānānanda's ashram. *Guru*, p. 93. In the early days, monks from Sivānanda's ashram would stay with Gnānānanda. The connection apparently continues to this day, since when I visited Tapovanam in 2001, there were two visiting monks from Sivānanda Ashram. There is a reference to Sivānanda's ideas on *guru-bhakti* in *Ermites du Saccidananda*, p. 99, ft. 7. *Guru-bhakti* was also emphasized by Gnānānanda.

[288] Sister Vandana, R.S.C.J.: "A Messenger of Light", *Clergy Monthly*, December 1974, p. 497.

> drawn into "name and form" as though they had, in their aspirations, pierced "the cloud of unknowing" and had come out into pure white light.[289]

Before the *dīkshā*, Abhishiktānanda wrote to Chaduc about Chidananda:

> The Greek and Cartesian mentality. Chidanandaji plays marvellously with both of them; in any case, are they not both simply *ideas*? Certainly this experience of advaita deals a heavy blow to all laws, rites and formulations.[290]

Based on his discussions with Chidananda, Abhishiktānanda wrote *Sannyasa: The Call to the Desert*. This book was first published in serial form (7 issues) in the Sivānanda Ashram publication *The Divine Life*, from September 1973 onwards. Chidananda prescribed this book to be read by those in the ashram who wanted to be initiated. The book has since been included in *The Further Shore.*

In his own book *The Philosophy, Psychology and Practice of Yoga*[291] Chidananda seems to accept the Samkhya dualism between *Purusha* and *Prakriti* (p. 6). But later in the book, he says that *Prakriti* is nothing but *māyā* and that therefore there is no *Prakriti* at all (pp. 135, 145). We should reject that which is unreal (p. 66). We recognize the unreal by reason of our mind, which is also unreal. When thought ceases, mind ceases. In this connection Chidananda writes about the doctrine of no-mind, *Amanaskatga*:

> Through our thought-process only we come to the conclusion that inside us there is something other than the body. Through our thought-process only we recognise the existence of the mind. If there is no thought-process, we will not even know that there is a mind. (p. 176)

Chidananda says that there is a link between the mind and the inner sense-centre. It may be cut off, then the outer sense may perceive the object and the inner sense may register it, but the mind will refuse to pay attention to it (p. 128). One is then detached, unaffected, with a witness-consciousness. Chidananda also refers to intuitive experience and the direct vision by the Yogis. He cites the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* for the distinction between self and not-self (p. 67). He is against the seeking of special powers or *siddhis*, but he does mention the importance of *śakti* and *kundalini* (pp. 123, 193).

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[289] *Ibid*. It is interesting how Chidananda's description uses both Christian and Hindu terms.

[290] *Letters*, p. 294 (MC, 12.4.73).

Chidananda sees many similarities between *advaita* and other religions. He refers to the Buddha, and also makes comparisons to Christianity. For example, he says that renunciation is like the agony of Jesus (pp. 24, 28).

Abhishiktānanda continued to visit Sivānanda Ashram as late as 1973. He read a book there by Sivānanda that made him want to return to the sacred texts.[292] It was while he was staying at Sivānanda Ashram in 1973 that Abhishiktānanda had his heart attack. At the time of his heart attack, he was found lying in the road by a friend from Sivānanda ashram.[293]

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[291] Swami Chidananda: *The Philosophy, Psychology and Practice of Yoga* (The Divine Life Society, 1991). Page numbers cited are from this edition.

[292] *Letters*, p. 328 (MC, 8.4.73): "Sivānanda's book has made me go to the texts [Hindu Scriptures]".

[293] This was Mother Yvonne. Her account of finding Abhishiktānanda after his heart attack is set out in the article by Sister Vandana, R.S.C.J.: "A Messenger of Light", *Clergy Monthly*, December, 1974, p. 500.

IV. Abhishiktānanda's Description of His Advaitic Experience

A. *Doubts and Authenticity of the experience*

Abhishiktānanda had doubts concerning the authenticity of his *advaitic* experience. He wondered whether his experience was a "mirage" and whether he was risking his eternity by continuing the experiments with the experience.[1] What kept him going in his experiments with *advaita* was his belief that if the Christian mystery is true, it will still be intact beyond the *advaitic* experience.[2] He was also aware of the possibility of misunderstanding the experience, or of confusing it with feelings, or with an impulse from the subliminal psyche.[3] He wondered whether he was attracted to *advaita* only because it was exotic, daring, and rare.[4] In the view of some Hindus, these doubts show that Abhishiktānanda did not attain the *advaitic* experience:

> I must say that the idea that Abhishiktānanda had to reconcile his *advaitic* experience with Christianity is absurd. If it is true, then I postulate that he did not have the *advaitic* experience. *Advaitic* experience is self-contained and its own proof. It does not require reconciliation with any sectarian creed. It transcends them.[5]

Abhishiktānanda himself agreed that his doubts were not consistent with an *advaitic* experience:

> In the experience there is no doubt–*na samśaya*! So what do these doubts mean? The ego [*ahamkāra*] and the intellect [*buddhi*] are unwilling to disappear.[6]

Panikkar had discussions with Abhishiktānanda about his doubts. In his "Letter to Abhishiktānanda", written after Abhishiktānanda's death, Panikkar writes:

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[1] *Diary*, p. 180 (27.11.56).

[2] Odette Baumer-Despeigne: "The Spiritual Way of Henri Le Saux Swami Abhishiktānanda", *Bulletin of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue*, 1993, vol. 48, Oct., p. 21 (17.4.56).

[3] Abhishiktānanda "Esseulement" (1956), *Intériorité*, p. 136; "Notes de théologie trinitaire", *Intériorité*, p. 239.

[4] *Diary*, p. 75 (27.9.53).

[5] Sita Ram Goel: *Catholic Ashrams: Sannyasins or Swindlers?* (New Delhi; Voice of India, 1988, revised 1994), p. 137 (Correspondence from Devananda to Bede Griffiths). Goel says at p. 65 that Abhishiktānanda's poetry was mistaken for mystical experience.

[6] *Diary*, p. 373 (13.4.73).

> You knew that the true experience is irresistible and that you had not yet undergone it, since doubts were still creeping into your…what? Was it not the *mind* that was responsible for all this conflict? You used to retort, when you felt that I was making it too simple: Would not the entire structure of Christianity collapse? Would it not mean "the explosion of dogmatic, cultural and sociological Christianity?" So what? was my immediate, exasperating reaction.[7]

From Abhishiktānanda's own writings, it is evident that he did not achieve the *advaitic* experience until at least 1972, the year before he died, and perhaps not even until his heart attack in 1973.

In 1953, while in the Arutpal Tirtham cave at Arunāchala, he wrote that he had had more the *idea* of *advaita* than the *res* [the thing itself, the reality]. He wrote that he had not had the experience itself:

> For the time being I am playing with *advaita.* I am like someone on the point of taking a swim in the sea, who reassures himself, dips a toe in the water, and indefinitely postpones the dive which alone will give peace. I try to understand my *advaita* as a Christian and a Westerner… [8]

When Harilal first met him in 1953, he urged Abhishiktānanda to make the plunge into *advaita*. They met again in March 1957. Harilal was amazed that Abhishiktānanda had not yet "arrived" at the *advaitic* experience.[9]

At the end of 1956, Abhishiktānanda made a retreat at Mauna Mandir [The Temple of Silence] at Kumbakkonam. He stayed for 32 days in an underground room in total seclusion and complete silence. Food was handed in through the window. His only book was the breviary, and his only activity was celebrating the Eucharist and writing in his diary. While on this retreat at Mauna Mandir, Abhishiktānanda wrote that he had not yet achieved the experience:

> I was hoping, at least in some ways, that here the enlightenment would take place and that the definitive light, the experience [*anubhūti*] would solve the problem by transcending it, whatever might be the practical consequences of this experience. But here, nothing!"[10]

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[7]Raimundo Panikkar: "Letter to Abhishiktānanda", *Studies in Formative Spirituality* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University, 1982), n. 3, p. 439.

[8] *Diary*, p. 66 (21.3.53 and 23.3.53).

[9] *Diary*, p. 201 (21.3.57). Harilal had originally told him that non-realization was nothing but an excuse to escape from reality. Abhishiktānanda: "Un Ermite de l'Inde, Harilal", *Revue Monchanin (1970), Vol. III, No. 5, p. 5.*

[10] *Diary*, p. 194 (6.12.56).

In 1967, Abhishiktānanda expressed the fear that, despite all that he had written, his so-called experience might be nothing but a projection of his desire to exist (*besoin d'être*).[11] The Self that he was trying to experience is said to be not subject to death; he therefore wondered whether his attempt to reach it was merely a desire to survive death.

In 1969, Abhishiktānanda spoke of the anguish that had pursued him since his experience at Arunāchala some 16 years before. This anguish included his growing awareness of the incompatibilities of his Christian religious beliefs and practices with this experience.

In May 1972, Abhishiktānanda was at Phūlchatti, a simple ashram near Rishikesh. He was there with his disciple Marc Chaduc. While they were there, Chaduc had a profound spiritual experience, which will be described in more detail later in this chapter. It was only at this time that Abhishiktānanda's doubts were dispelled. He wrote in his diary, "The experience of the Upanishads is true, *I know it!*"[12]

In a letter written a month later, Abhishiktānanda again wrote that he now knew the *advaitic* experience for himself:

> I think that now I shall no longer approach P. (or indeed anyone else) with the thought that *he knows* and that *I do not know*, for *now I do know, vedāham!*[13]

This passage shows that, up to this time, Abhishiktānanda had been comparing his experience with what he observed and what others told him, including his friend Panikkar. Had these other friends criticized his experience as not being authentic? Abhishiktānanda shows a little resentment evident here with respect to these past criticisms. In any event, these friends, including Panikkar, concede that by the end of his life, Abhishiktānanda did in fact reach the "other shore", the *advaitic* experience.[14]

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[11] *Diary*, p. 294 (5.3.67).

[12] *Diary*, p. 348 (11.5.72).

[13] *Letters*, p. 303 (MC, 3.6.72).

[14] Raimon Panikkar: "Letter to Abhishiktānanda", p. 431. Panikkar himself says that there can hardly be any doubt about the validity of Abhishiktānanda's experience. See *Occasional Bulletin of the Abhishiktānanda Society* #7, Nov. 1983. However, André Gozier says that Vedāntists consider that Abhishiktānanda had only known *savikalpa samādhi*, corresponding to ecstasy, and not *nirvikalpa*. André Gozier: *Le Père Henri Le Saux à la rencontre de l'hinsouisme* (Paris: Centurion, 1988). This book by Gozier has in turn been criticized as inconsistent and too hasty. See Occasional Bulletin #14 (December, 1992).

B. Criteria of Authenticity

Abhishiktānanda claimed to have experienced *advaita*. But how doe we decide as to the authenticity of this experience? Do we just accept Abhishiktānanda's word that he achieved the experience? Can his claim be disputed? William James gives a way to judge the authenticity of an experience. He sets out three criteria by which to judge whether a religious experience is authentic: (a) immediate luminousness of the experience (b) philosophical reasonableness and (c) moral effect.[15] All of these will be looked at in this thesis.

1. Immediate Luminousness of the Experience

This is the primary criterion of authenticity. It is related to James's distinction between mere "knowledge about" something and a "knowledge by acquaintance". James explains this difference as the difference between knowing facts about an apple and actually tasting the apple. In assessing authenticity, James says that we must ask whether the person having the experience has a sense of the immediate force of this knowledge by acquaintance. Is the experience impossible to ignore? Is it at least as vivid as sensory experience? Does it have more reality than other experiences? Is there a feeling of new depths of truth being given?[16]

Immediate luminousness is a criterion that can be verified only by the person having the experience. A non-mystic does not have this vividness of experience, and so can only rely on the testimony of someone like Abhishiktānanda. We can, however, examine this testimony to see whether it claims or displays such immediacy. This chapter of the thesis looks at Abhishiktānanda's descriptions of his experience to assess their vividness and directness.

2. Philosophical Reasonableness

This criterion is less direct than immediate luminousness. It asks how the person makes sense of the experience. When our experience conflicts with our previous psychological or cultural expectations, this causes anxiety; we search for a new interpretive grid. We try to maximize the continuity with our previous beliefs, but to still address the unexpected conflicts in

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[15] William James: *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Harvard, 1985), p. 23.

[16] William James: *Talks to Teachers on Psychology and to Students on Some of Life's Ideals* (Harvard, 1983), p. 139.

the experience. Abhishiktānanda recognized this process in his own life. He writes of trying to incorporate his new experience with Ramaṇa Maharshi into his previous mental structures without shattering them.[17] Even after 1972, when he was certain of the *advaitic* experience, he still tried to make sense of his previous beliefs. He says that the teaching of *advaita* destroys all the *nāmarūpas* of Christianity.[18] The following chapters of this thesis are an attempt to assess the philosophical reasonableness of Abhishiktānanda's explanations of his experience.

3. Moral effect

It was because of James's interest in mysticism that he proposed a pragmatic theory of truth and not a correspondence theory. The truth of a statement, including a statement about a religious experience, is judged by the results that it brings. According to James, we must ask whether the religious experience initiates, on the whole and over the long run, positive consequences for the individual and for the community.[19] William Barnard has written about this pragmatic theory of truth in relation to mysticism. In Barnard's view, pragmatism can work to assess claims that have been made in a nondual context.[20] The moral effect of Abhishiktānanda's experience will be addressed in Chapter VII of this thesis.

C. Levels of Advaitic Experience

The idea of levels of *advaitic* experience is useful for this thesis, particularly in view of the fact that it was not until the year before his death that Abhishiktānanda himself believed he had achieved the *advaitic* experience. Most of Abhishiktānanda's writings were therefore written prior to what he regarded as the definitive experience. If there were no stages or levels to the *advaitic* experience, then these writings would have to be regarded as mere speculations. On

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[17] *Secret*, p. 9.

[18] *Diary*, p. 351 (20.5.72).

[19] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Harvard, 1985), p. 25. James points out that this is an amplification of the Biblical testing of the "fruits" of religious experience. Zaehner uses a similar criterion in judging the value of a mystical experience: does the experience result in love? R.C. Zaehner: *Mysticism Sacred and Profane* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1957).

[20] Barnard, *Exploring Unseen Worlds: William James and the Philosophy of Mysticism* (State University of New York, 1997), pp. 347, 348. At p. 281, Barnard points out that the connection with these criteria of authenticity is not always seen because when James formulated these criteria of authenticity, he had not yet articulated his pragmatic theory of truth.

the other hand, if there are stages to the experience, then even early writings can be reviewed in this thesis, since they may disclose preliminary levels or stages.

Ken Wilber has written about various levels in the *advaitic* experience. Wilber refers to a "Spectrum of Consciousness"–different levels of consciousness, which precede the *advaitic* experience.[21] At one end of this spectrum lies the narrowed sense of identity associated with egoic consciousness; at the other end of the spectrum is the supreme "identity" with cosmic consciousness which is found in the *advaitic* experience. As our consciousness progresses along this spectrum, various dualities are overcome as we move beyond our personal ego to the *advaitic* experience and to the True Self.[22]

Wilber distinguishes between three modes of knowledge: The eye of flesh (sensory objects), the eye of reason (mental objects) and the eye of contemplation (the transcendent).[23] He correlates these three modes of knowledge to the first three levels of consciousness described by Hinduism: waking, dreaming and deep sleep (also called the Gross, Subtle and Causal levels). Wilber distinguishes several stages within each of these three levels. The fourth level of consciousness, *turīya*, which Wilber refers to as Absolute Spirit or Mind, transcends all three levels; it is beyond all dualities.

Although the vocabulary certainly differs, the idea of levels of *advaitic* experience can be found in Abhishiktānanda's own writings. Abhishiktānanda did not achieve the *advaitic* experience until at least 1972. But he writes that he had "tastes", "touches" or "glimpses" of the experience. As we will see, he describes his experiences with Ramaṇa and Gnānānanda as "glimpses." Abhishiktānanda refers to various experiences which are not the complete experience but which point to the *advaitic* experience:

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[21] Wilber refers explicitly to Ramaṇa's method of Self-Enquiry; Wilber's writings are therefore useful in describing Abhishiktānanda's experience. See Ken Wilber: *The Spectrum of Consciousness* (Wheaton: Theosophical Publishing House, 1977) and Roger Walsh and Frances Vaughan (eds.) *Paths Beyond Ego* (New York: Tarcher, 1993). I have simplified Wilber's scheme for the purposes of this thesis. Wilber says that this is a "perennial psychology", corresponding to the perennial philosophy. I recognize that Wilber's ideas contain assumptions that may not always correspond to Abhishiktānanda's. Although there are differences between them, the idea of levels of experience is a fruitful one to use in understanding Abhishiktānanda's experience. A detailed one to one correlation of Wilber's ideas to those of Abhishiktānanda is beyond the scope of this thesis.

[22] Wilber says that failure to overcome these dualisms leads to differing pathologies at each level, necessitating different kinds of psychological therapy.

> For it is the "touches" of the Spirit on the soul–often fleeting and gentle, but at times overwhelming and devastating–which prepare the soul for the ultimate revelation that she herself is *sat-cit-ānanda* within the supreme and only *Saccidānanda.* At first they are like brief flashes in the night; later they resemble the gentle, pervasive radiance of the dawn, and are the sign and precursor of the full appearance of the Self, at the sunrise of Being.[24]

Abhishiktānanda therefore believed that there are experiences that are precursors of the full experience. We have also seen that Abhishiktānanda was influenced by D.K. Mehta, who spoke of seven levels of consciousness, corresponding to the *cakras* and to various angelic orders.[25] Abhishiktānanda sometimes refers to these *cakras*. In other places, Abhishiktānanda refers to the four stages of consciousness (waking, dreaming, deep sleep and *turīya*). He says, for example, "Everything explodes when you have reached the fourth [stage of consciousness]."[26]

Elsewhere, Abhishiktānanda writes of there being "tastes" of the *advaitic* experience. In 1956, Abhishiktānanda wrote, "Whoever has once had the "taste" of *advaita* on his tongue, no longer enjoys the flavour of anything else."[27]

These various levels of experience are themselves distinguishable only as a result of logical distinctions and dualities. Do these distinctions still apply once one has achieved the *advaitic* experience? Abhishiktānanda says that once a person achieves the *advaitic* experience, the experience has no "taste" at all. He says that the supreme experience has neither taste nor form by which one can refer to it to either think or talk of it. It cannot be perceived by any of the senses, and is outside all pairs of opposites. One can say nothing of the experience. It just is. When the experience appears, all thoughts disappear, just as the stars disappear when the sun

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[23] Abhishiktānanda also refers to the eye of flesh and the eye of reason. *Guhāja*, p. 40.

[24] *Saccidānanda*, p. 185.

[25] The *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha* also refers to seven stages in meditation. See Andrew O. Fort: *Jīvanmukti in Transformation* (State University of New York, 1998), p. 94.

[26] *Letters*, p. 301 (RP, 25.6.73).

[27] *Diary,* p. 136 (6.1.56). The metaphor of "taste" is used by Ken Wilber, who has published a book with the title *One Taste*. Wilber argues for many levels of religious experience, corresponding to various levels in the "spectrum of consciousness."

appears.[28] Therefore, the very idea of "tastes" or "stages" is something that applies only to one who has not yet achieved the experience.

D. Pre-1972 "Tastes" of the Advaitic Experience

1. Ramaṇa Maharshi

a) Numinousness and Mystery

Abhishiktānanda's first "taste" of an *advaitic* experience was during his brief visits with Ramaṇa Maharshi. Abhishiktānanda speaks of this experience with Ramaṇa as a "glimpse" of *advaita*:

> Ultimately, all arguments and reflections are secondary. There is one fact which determines everything: the religious experience which I had on non-Christian ground with an intensity never even glimpsed until then, but which was in line with all that I had obscurely felt before. Ramana's *advaita* is my birthplace. The original womb [*mūlagarbha*]. Against that, all reasoning is shattered.[29]

He said that the chants, which he heard for the first time at Ramaṇa's ashram, carried him to an unknown world, the source of his being.[30] It was an intense religious experience for Abhishiktānanda. We could perhaps say that this was a numinous experience, an intense religious experience of the holy.[31] But numinousness in itself is not decisive in indicating an *advaitic* experience. A feeling of the holy may sometimes be more indicative of a dualistic religious experience, since the "holy" is perceived as other than oneself. As we shall see in Chapter IX of this thesis, Abhishiktānanda rejects any view of God as Wholly Other. Therefore, Abhishiktānanda's descriptions of his religious experiences should not be seen in such dualistic terms. Rather, they are a recognition of a mystery that is not other than the source of his own being.

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[28] "Notes de théologie trinitaire" (1973), *Intériorité*, pp. 239, 240; *Further Shore*, p. 61.

[29] *Diary*, p. 122, (Sept. 55).

[30] *Secret*, p. 7.

[31] See Rudolf Otto: *The Idea of the Holy* (Oxford, 1923).

b) Explosion, shock, shattering

The *advaitic* experience gives a shock, it is "shattering", it causes an "explosion". "Everything explodes when you have reached the fourth *mātra* of the OM."[32] Abhishiktānanda speaks of Ramaṇa's *advaita* as a "shattering" of reasoning. Wilber regards this as one of the essential stages in the *advaitic* experience–the going beyond our normal reflexive logic to what he calls "vision logic." In vision logic, we go beyond the subject-object relation involved in conceptual thinking. The extent to which *advaitic* experience affects thinking will be discussed in more detail in Chapter VI of this thesis.

Abhishiktānanda refers to overwhelming experiences ("*éblouissements*").[33] These experiences shatter one's previous conceptions, whether these conceptions are Christian or Hindu. This is how Abhishiktānanda described the mission of the Buddha. He says that the mission of the Buddha expressed in "drastically negative" terms his intuition *éblouissante* of the inaccessibility of the mystery of Being.[34] Abhishiktānanda's experience with Ramaṇa undermined his previous conceptual system, including his beliefs as a Catholic Christian. He said that the Greek structures that are now present in Christian thought have to explode.[35]

It is interesting that Monchanin used the same metaphor of "explosion" to describe the effect of mystical experience upon ideas. In 1956 he wrote,

> L'expérience mystique conduit au silence, elle est rigoreusement indicible. A son contact, les idées explosent, fission de toute expérience humaine sous la pression divine.[36]

It is therefore possible that Abhishiktānanda obtained this idea of the "explosion" of ideas from Monchanin. However, he did not just write about it. He experienced this explosion in a way that caused him personal anguish.

The shattering caused by *advaita* is not just a shattering of concepts, but of one's view of one's self:

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[32] *Letters*, p. 301 (RP, 25.6.73).

[33] *Letters*, p. 199 (OB 8.3.68).

[34] *Intériorité*, p. 178.

[35] Abhishiktānanda: "An Approach to Hindu Spirituality" *Clergy Review,* (1969) Vol. LIV, No. 3, p. 166.

> It is a question of a veritable fission of the self, the nuclear explosion of the individual and the passage to the Totally-Other, who is no longer an other.[37]

Elsewhere he describes this "fission of the self" in more detail:

> In the mystical fission there is revealed the impermanence of the superficial ego; in this implacable light the substance and the heart itself of this ego appears. It is unattainable and incomprehensible and undefinable to human thought and to psychical consciousness, just as the matter which has been pierced through in its substance itself by the mechanism of fission, finally appears to the scientist as only a point of energy.[38]

Abhishiktānanda thought of his own writings as causing such an explosion. He once said that the cover-design for his next book should be the mushroom-shaped cloud that goes with a nuclear explosion.[39]

2. Caves of Arunāchala

a) Devotion to Arunāchala

Arunāchala is one of India's most sacred mountains and stands over the temple town of Tiruvannamalai. The mountain is formed from igneous rock, and its summit is 1000 meters above sea level. The mountain is identified with Shiva; it has been regarded as a colossal *Shivalinga*.[40] It is said that Shiva appeared as a column of fire on Arunāchala, creating the original symbol of the *lingam*. Every November/December full moon, there is a festival celebrating this legend. A huge fire, lit from a 30-meter wick immersed in 2000 liters of *ghee*, burns from the top of Arunāchala for several days.

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[36] Cited in *Jules Monchanin: Regards croisés d'Occident et d'Orient* (Lyon: Profac-Credic 1997), p. 277.

[37] Odette Baumer-Despeigne: "The Spiritual Way of Henri Le Saux Swami Abhishiktānanda", *Bulletin of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue*, 1993, vol. 48, Oct., p. 21.

[38] "Présence de Dieu-Présence à Dieu", *Intériorité*, p. 148 [my translation].

[39] Diary, p. 310 (MR, 2.9.73). Sara Grant*: "Time Bomb or Tomb-Stone?, Vidyajyoti, Feb. 1988, p. 88.*

[40] M. Eliade observes that rocks often have a religious significance and point beyond themselves: "In its grandeur, its hardness, its shape and colour, man is faced with a reality and a force that belongs to some world other than the profane of which he is himself a part." M. Eliade: *Patterns of Comparative Religion* (New American Library, 1958), p. 216. Cited by J.S. Krüger: *Along Edges*, p. 67.

Abhishiktānanda spent many months in solitude in caves on Arunāchala. Abhishiktānanda was imitating Ramaṇa's experience.[41] He dressed as a Hindu monk and meditated on the teachings of Ramaṇa. Abhishiktānanda believed that his meditation in the caves was in some ways even more important than Ramaṇa himself:

> If Ramaṇa was indeed great, how much more so must this Arunāchala which drew Ramaṇa to himself, how much more so the mystery of Arunāchala? In the end then Ramaṇa would only be one of those–no doubt the greatest of those belonging to our time–who in the course of ages have quenched their thirst at this fountain which never ceases to flow, and in the shelter of the Mountain have discovered in the depth of their own heart the living mystery of Arunāchala.[42]

But Abhishiktānanda also says that if Arunāchala was a *guru* to Ramaṇa, it was because he had projected the true *guru* in himself onto this outward form.[43] In other words, Arunāchala pointed the way to the true *guru*. It is for this reason that Abhishiktānanda later recommends his disciple Chaduc to go to Arunāchala: "The peak, the caves, the waters [of Arunāchala], all that is your own mystery!"[44]

Abhishiktānanda also relates the silence of the mountain to Ramaṇa's teaching by silence. "In silence, you taught me silence, O Arunāchala! You who never leave your silence."[45]

Ramaṇa wrote devotional poetry in praise of the mountain Arunāchala.[46] Some see this devotion or *bhakti* by Ramaṇa as inconsistent with his *advaita*. Does not devotion imply an "other" to whom one is devoted? And is such *bhakti* consistent with an *advaitic* experience that denies any distinctions? In any event, Abhishiktānanda also imitated Ramaṇa in writing such devotional poetry to Arunāchala.

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[41] Abhishiktānanda had also been impressed by the fact that St. Benedict, the founder of his order, had lived as a hermit in a cave for three years. See *A Benedictine Ashram*, pp. 53-54. The Rule of St. Benedict expressly refers to hermits or Anchorites.

[42] *Secret*, p. 23.

[43] *Guru*, p. 13.

[44] *Letters*, p. 292 (MC 30.12.71). Chaduc did go, and was robbed of all his things at Arunāchala.

[45] *Diary*, p. 34 (4.4.52). This echoes Ramaṇa's own "The Marital Garden of Letters" or "Hymn to Arunāchala", v. 36. *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, pp. 52ff.

[46] "The Marital Garden of Letters" or "Hymn to Arunāchala", v. 36. *Collected Works*, pp. 52ff. Abhishiktānanda translated some of *Ramaṇa's* poems; see *Letters*, p. 142. *Secret*, p. 23 contains a long quotation from Ramaṇa's "Marital Garland."

Abhishiktānanda continued to compose poems to the mountain Arunāchala even when he was absent from it. For example, in October 1956, he wrote a poem while on his silent retreat at Mauna Mandir. Abhishiktānanda calls the mountain "Lord". I quote excerpts from both the original French and the English translation

Je chanterais un chant pour mon Bien-Aimé
mon Seigneur Arunāchala
des mots que Lui-même puisa dans mon cœur
en son propre cœur.
Je tresserai une guirlande de fleurs
pour mon Bien-Aimé Śiva Arunāchala
de fleurs qu'il cueillit Lui-même au jardin de mon cœur
en son propre cœur.
…
Et je me consumerai comme l'encens
que j'élève devant Toi
de Toi venu, à Toi passé
Seul rien que Toi
O Arunāchala.…

This has been translated as:

I will sing a song for my Beloved
my Lord Arunāchala
with the words that He himself drew from my heart
in his own heart.
I will plait a garland of flowers
for my Beloved Shiva Arunāchala
with flowers that he Himself plucked in the garden of my heart
in his own heart.
…
And I will burn myself up like the incense
that I offer before Thee
having come from Thee, having passed into Thee,
nothing but thyself alone,
O Arunāchala.… [47]

In another poem composed at the same time, Abhishiktānanda says,

> …
> Tu m'as violée, ô Arunāchala
> comme une vierge à qui on dit des mots d'amour,
> et Tu m'as laissèe là,
> comme .ça, devant Toi…
> …
> Et je reste là, gisant, nue, comme ça,
> et je n'ai même plus la force de me relever,
> je suis couverte de honte,
> je n'ose même plus me regarder…
> Tout cela, c'est Ton œuvre, ô Arunāchala…

This has been translated as:

> You have ravished me, O Arunāchala,
> like a young girl to whom someone has made love,
> and you left me here, like this before you.
> …
> And I remain here naked, prostrate, like this,
> and I no longer have even the strength to rise,
> I am covered with shame
> I no longer dare even to look at myself…
> All that is Your work, O Arunāchala[48]

There are allusions here to the poetry of the Song of Solomon in the Bible. But there are also distinct allusions to Ramaṇa's own devotional poems to Arunāchala.

In another remarkable poem, he calls the mountain "Jesus": "O Jesus Arunāchala!"[49] What is absolutely new for Abhishiktānanda is this feeling of devotion for something in a non-Christian context:

> And if to become Christian again I had to give you up, O Arunāchala, to abandon you, O Ramaṇa, then I would never be able to become Christian again…[50]

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[47] *La montée,* pp. 199, 200; *Diary*, p. 159 (11.11.56).

[48] *La montée*, p. 204; Diary, pp. 163-164 (15.11.56).

[49] *Diary*, p. 162 (15.11.56).

[50] *Diary*, p. 175 (24.11.56).

b) Guhāntara

Abhishiktānanda says that it was during Lent of 1953 while he was in the cave at Arutpāl Tīrtham that he understood *advaita*. He then wrote the essential pages of *Guhāntara*.[51] '*Guhāntara*' means 'the dweller in the cave'.[52] Abhishiktānanda intended a double reference: to the *sannyāsī* in the cave, and to the one who dwells in the 'cave of the heart'. The book was an attempt to record his new understanding of *advaita*.

When Abhishiktānanda attempted to publish *Guhāntara*, the Roman Catholic censor found the work to be heretical.[53] This questioning of Abhishiktānanda's orthodoxy also caused disagreements between himself and Monchanin, even though Monchanin had written a favourable Preface to the book.[54] *Guhāntara* was never published during Abhishiktānanda's lifetime. But most chapters of the book have since been published.[55] A few parts still remain unpublished.

Abhishiktānanda says that *Guhāntara* was "the immediate expression of the overwhelming experience." He says,

> Each day I rediscover its meaning afresh, as if the words had poured forth even before I had become aware of them.[56]

It may be questioned whether Abhishiktānanda is correct that *Guhāntara* was an "immediate expression" of his experience. Much of *Guhāntara* is highly ramified or conceptual

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[51] *Diary*, p. 213 (16.5.58).

[52] Monchanin's Preface is reproduced in *Jules Monchanin: Mystique de l'Inde, mystère chretien*, ed. Suzanne Siauve (Paris: Fayard, 1974). pp. 269-273. The word '*Guhāntara'* was coined by Abhishiktānanda himself. At first he intended it as a pseudonym for authorship of the book. *Letters*, p. 70, ft. 35.

[53] Abhishiktānanda was therefore surprised when in 1954 he lent a copy of *Guhāntara* to Ethel Merstone. She found it "intolerably Christian".

[54] Monchanin admired the book even if he disagreed strongly with parts of it. Monchanin wrote to a friend that that no one had ever gone as far in their spiritual apperception of Hindusim as Abhishiktānanda had in this book, and that it demanded a re-thinking of the Trinity and of creation. *Lettres à Père LeSaux*, p. 128, note 2.

[55] These parts have been published in *Initiation*: "La Grace de L'Inde (pp. 41-47) and "Jusqu'à la source, l'expérience de non-dualité"(pp. 57-64).

These parts have been published in *Intérioreté*: "Cheminements Intérireurs" (pp. 41-80), "Ehieh asher ehieh" (pp. 81-102) and "Epiphanie de Dieu" (pp. 103-126)..

[56] *Letters*, p. 68 (L, 8.12.53). Later he wrote that some of the words he wrote were only fully understood very much later. *Letters*, p. 284 (MC, 26.1.73).

Even those parts of *Guhāntara* which are in poetic form contain many conceptual ideas. For example, the first poem begins,

> Arunāchala est un symbole
> et Arunāchala est une réalité,
> un haut lieu de la terre dravidienne,
> rougeoyante, arouna, aux rayons du soleil levant,
> où se vénère le Linga de feu,
> le signe élémentaire du Dieu vivant
> qui parut au Buisson
> et sur l'"Horeb
> le Feu qui consume et le feu qui éclaire,
> Deus ignis consumens,
> Lux mundi
> Paran jyoti
> Phōs hilaron
> la lumière joyeuse de la gloire immortelle
> du Bienheureux,

A literal translation of this would be:

> Arunāchala is a symbol
> and Arunāchala is a Reality,
> a high-place of the Dravidian land
> taking on the red hues, Aruṇa [God of the dawn], in the rays of the rising sun,
> where is venerated the linga of fire,
> the elemental sign of the Living God
> who appeared in the Burning Bush
> and at [Mount] Horeb
> the Fire that consumes and the fire that enlightens,
> Deus ignis consumens, [Consuming fire of God]
> Lux mundi [Light of the world]
> Paran jyoti [Highest light or truth]
> Phōs hilaron [Joyful light]
> The joyful light of the immortal glory
> Of the Blessed One,
> Bhagavan.[57]

In this brief excerpt we see comparisons between the revelation of God to Hindus and the Biblical revelation. Abhishiktānanda compares the flame and lingam of Arunāchala [the reddish, dawn-coloured mountain] with the revelation of God to Moses and to the revelation in Christ

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[57] A slightly different translated version is given in *Secret*, p. 53. The name 'Arunāchala' itself means 'the red-coloured mountain' ('aruna' means 'colour of dawn', and 'āchala' means 'mountain').

who is the light of the world. Latin, Greek and Sanskrit words are combined. There are references to ancient Christian hymns such as *Phos Hilaron* and to the Hindu reverence for light [*jyoti*]. He compares them all to the joyful light he found in Ramaṇa [*Bhagavan*].

Most of *Guhāntara* consists of essays. These essays are at least as complex as anything else that Abhishiktānanda has written. Some of the philosophical and theological issues discussed in *Guhāntara* are: the nature of enlightenment, the difference between *saguna* and *nirguṇa Brahman*, the difference between *nirvikalpa* and *sahaja samādhi*, and the four states of consciousness ending in the *turīya*, the state of the one who is liberated in this body (*jivanmukti)*, the role of the *guru*, and the importance of the *sannyāsī.* Abhishiktānanda compares the spirituality of India in its popular form to that of those who know *Brahman*, and he compares the relation of Hindu spirituality to Christian spirituality. I will discuss all of these issues in more detail in this thesis.

Of special interest are those passages in *Guhāntara* that deal specifically with the focus of this thesis: Abhishiktānanda's understanding of how *advaita* is nondual but also non-monistic (*an-eka*). As will be discussed, Abhishiktānanda relates this understanding to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. In Chapter X, I will also examine Abhishiktānanda's use of the word *aneka.*

After he had written *Guhāntara, Abhishiktānanda* met Harilal. Harilal's extreme *advaita* raised doubts about what he had written about *advaita* in *Guhāntara.* Abhishiktānanda asked, "Have I, who dared to write it, understood it myself?"[58] And elsewhere he writes,

> And my *pride* in having *realized something* has been swept away […] The great pride of being convinced that one has passed beyond *advaita* when one has scarcely set foot on the path. . .[59]

There is a recognition here by Abhishiktānanda that *advaita* is a path which he had just commenced. This again suggests that there are stages or levels to the experience.

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[58] *Letters*, p. 70 (L, 23.1.54).

[59] *Diary*, p. 113 (2.8.55).

c) Solitude-Silence-Poverty

Abhishiktānanda sums up his experience in the caves in three words: "Solitude-Silence-Poverty." He says that before he had just been a dilettante in his practice of monasticism, but that in the caves he was confronted with what he still lacked for this practice to be complete.[60] During his first stay in the caves, he had a theoretical understanding of *sannyāsa.* By the next year, *sannyāsa* was for him no longer a thought, a "concept", but rather an "inborn summons".[61]

His record of his experience in the cave refers to being "alone." It is being "alone in the very aloneness of the Alone." The solitude of the *sannyāsī* is an imitation of the aloneness of *Brahman*, "That besides which there is no other" (*ekam advitīyam*). Everything that the primitive Upanishads attribute to *ātman* or *Brahman*, uniqueness and aloneness (*kaivalyam*) is attributed by the Sannyasopanishads to the *sannyasi* himself. The *neti-neti* becomes incarnate by the *sannyasin's* total refusal of all.[62] The solitude is not only an external solitude but also an internal solitude of the soul, in the cave of the heart:

> où, seul, devant Dieu l'on est;
> où, seul, avec Dieu l'on est;
> où, seul, en Dieu l'on est;
> où, seul, de Dieu l'on est;
> où, seul, est Celui qui est…
>
> [where all alone, before God one is,
> where all alone, with God one is,
> where all alone, in God one is,
> where all alone, from God one is,
> where alone, is He who IS.][63]

Later, he denies even this description of the solitude. He says that the solitude is an experience of *kevala*, the Absolute, an experience of the infinite solitude of God, not solitude with God, nor in God, the alone to the Alone, the alone with Alone, but the Alone infinitely and essentially alone.[64] Solitude is being alone, naked, a stripping, a spiritual nakedness. It is a

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[60] *Diary*, p. 33 (3.4.52).

[61] *Diary*, p. 70 (30.3.53).

[62] Foreword to *Further Shore*, p. ix.

[63] *Ermites du Saccidananda* (1954), p. 81.

[64] *Initiation,* p. 58.

stripping of habitual thought-forms, patterns of concepts, symbols and imagery, and of our deepest convictions. For the Christian, the stripping of solitude means that everything, his very faith, seems to be torn away from him.[65]

Abhishiktānanda found the discipline of silence difficult. But he says that the communication of thought by words is only necessary when there is a sense of duality.[66] By keeping silence he also wanted to achieve this realm beyond duality.

The experience in the caves confirmed for him the necessity of *sannyāsa* or Hindu monasticism. Abhishiktānanda saw Hindu monasticism as the bridge to Christian spirituality. In this connection it must be remembered that one of his initial reasons for going to India was to find a more rigorous monasticism than he had experienced at Kergonan. But this raises the following issue: to what extent was Abhishiktānanda's embracing of Hindu monasticism and *sannyāsa* in fact influenced by Christian traditions, especially the apophatic traditions of some of the Christian mystics and desert fathers? As we shall see in Chapter VI, Abhishiktānanda's extreme apophaticism led him to reject even the Hindu formulations of the *advaitic* experience. Furthermore, we must ask whether Abhishiktānanda is correct that monasticism is necessarily linked to the *advaitic* experience. Monasticism can also be used in a very dualistic view of spirituality, where one retreats from the material world. These issues will be discussed in more detail in Chapter VII, which looks at the difference between an acosmic view of *advaita* and a view that emphasizes world-accepting creativity.

d) Transcendence of Ego

His experience in the caves also led Abhishiktānanda to stages of consciousness that he had not previously experienced. He writes of the experience of the transcendence of his ego while in the caves:

> Dive down into myself, to the greatest depth of myself. Forget my own "*aham*" [I], lose myself in the "*aham*" of the divine *Ātman* who is at the origin of my

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[65] J.D.M. Stuart: "Abhishiktānanda on Inner Awakening", *Vidyajyoti* (1982), vol. 46, p. 481.

[66] *Diary*, p. 35 (4.4.52).

> being, of my consciousness of being. And in this unique–or primordial–*Aham* feel all beings as myself.[67]

This idea of "plunging within" is something that Ramaṇa wrote about, and Abhishiktānanda's writings here reflect his reading books about Ramaṇa during his stay in the caves.[68] Many of his writings at this time are an echo of Ramaṇa's ideas. Such writings therefore do not always carry the immediacy and vividness of an experience. It is however clear that Abhishiktānanda was experiencing an inwardness he had not experienced before. He writes that he experienced a loss of interest in externals because of this inwardness.[69] Such inwardness can be considered a stage in attaining *advaita*. It is the plunging inward of the eye of contemplation. But again an issue arises: is it necessary for such an inward experience to result in a lack of interest in externals? Does such a devaluation of external things not set up a new dualism? This will be discussed in Chapter VII of this thesis.

The practice of *sannyāsa* is a "stripping" that is both material (poverty and asceticism) and spiritual (of one's self). There is a renunciation not only of physical things but also of one's mental concepts, and even of one's own ego:

> Qu'en vain je n'ai pas pénétré en Ta caverne,
> que du mien, que de moi, rien oncques ne soit plus.
> Qu'en Toi je passe, que Toi je devienne "…]
> Et de *moi*, les traces mêmes, tu les as consumées.
>
> May I not have entered Your cave in vain;
> of 'mine' and 'me' may nothing any longer remain.
> May I pass into You, may I become You […]
> and of *myself* you have burnt up every trace.[70]

He says that Arunāchala has "snatched away all in them that might still have power to say: "I"!"[71] The true self is other than the ego: "I am farther away, under, deeper than the self that is speaking, eating, looking, listening, walking, thinking, desiring."[72]

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[67] *Diary*, p. 35 (5.4.52).

[68] See for example *Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, p. 75: "Ulladu Narpadu", verse 28 ("one should dive into oneself").

[69] *Letters*, p. 63, (L.29.4.53). In the booklet by Jean Herbert, *Quelques grands penseurs de l'Inde*, which Abhishiktānanda read before going to India, Herbert himself compares Ramaṇa to medieval mystics who, in seeking union with God, cease to take interest in all other things (p. 25).

[70] *La* Montée, p. 56; Diary, p. 37 (6.4.52).

According to Wilber, progressing along the spectrum of consciousness involves a going beyond one's ego. Even if Abhishiktānanda had not achieved realization of the Self, he had progressed in these levels.

e) Light, Fire and Flash

Abhishiktānanda uses the imagery of light to describe his experiences at Arunāchala. He compares the story of the light on Arunāchala to the inward light that he experienced:

> …in the very hearts of those who approach him Shiva Arunāchala suddenly appears, a pillar of fire which has no end either below or above, as it was in the beginning of things, a consuming flame and a guiding light, a spring of eternal Love![73]

This finding of Shiva within the heart, a Transcendence within Immanence is what Abhishiktānanda referred to as the "ascent to the depths."[74]

Much later, Abhishiktānanda remembered his experience of inner light at Arunāchala. He wrote his disciple Chaduc:

> Anyone who is the recipient of this overwhelming Light is at once petrified and shattered; he can say no more, he cannot think any more; he just remains there, outside space and time, alone in the very aloneness of the Alone; it is an unbelievable experience, this sudden breaking in of Arunāchala's infinite pillar of light and fire.[75]

Here again is the metaphor of being "shattered". The metaphor is linked with its opposite, of being "petrified". The shattering is linked to thought and speech. The *advaitic* experience is beyond both. There is a shattering of all conceptual forms. One is to free oneself from the *vrittis* of the mind, to reduce one's mental activity to nothing but consciousness of oneself, "and in the infinity of his own consciousness he can finally plunge into the supreme Consciousness and the supreme Self."[76]

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[71] *Secret*, p. 57.

[72] *Diary*, p. 42 (3.6.52).

[73] *Secret*, p. 51. On page 52 he compares this light to the burning bush experienced by Moses.

[74] This is also the title chosen by Panikkar for Abhishiktānanda's *Diary*: "Ascent to the Depth of the Heart".

[75] Cited in Introduction to *Secret*, p. ix.

[76] *Diary*, p. 36 (5.4.52).

The light is a fire which burns and consumes one's self:

> O Arunāchala […]
> De combien déjà–et depuis quand?–
> n'as-tu pas ainsi ravi le cœur?
> Papillon je me suis laissé tromper à ta flamme
> et tu m'y as consumé.
> Consume-moi, brûle en moi tout ce qui n'est pas Toi.
> O Colonne de Feu, ô Colonne d'Amour.
> O *Tejo-Linga,* ô Sperme de Feu.
> Que de ton Feu, je renaisse Toi…
>
> Fire of Arunāchala.
> From how much already–and since how long?–
> have you not thus ravished my heart?
> Like a moth, I have let myself be deceived by your flame
> and in it you have consumed me,
> Consume me, burn up in me all that is not You.
> O pillar of fire, O pillar of Love.
> O *Tejo-Linga*, O fiery Sperm,
> From your Fire, let me be reborn as You.[77]

The light is also a lightning flash that occurs in the blink of an eye. This is how Abhishiktānanda describes Ramaṇa's awakening: the lightning flashed: "That all passes away and disappears; but *myself*, I remain*, I am.*"[78] Abhishiktānanda refers to the Kena Upanishad regarding this illumination by Ramaṇa: "A lightning-flash; the eye blinks–Ah!–."

> Advaita is not an idea. It is! The lightning flashes, the eye blinks, as says the Kena. Then? ; You have either understood, or you have not understand…If you have not understood, too bad! Says the same Upanishad. If you have understood, you keep quiet, says the Mundaka…[79]

In Abhishiktānanda's understandingof the Upanishads,

> …what is important are these 'flashes', the lightning, the bursts of light, the break-throughs which open the abyss—not a gulf which would separate, but the abyss of yourself.[80]

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[77] *La* montée, p. 56; Diary, p. 36 (6.4.52).

[78] *Secret*, p. 17.

[79] *Letters*, p. 227 (RV 8.3.70).

[80] *Letters*, p. 271 (MC, 9.6.72)..

A vision of light is commonly found in reports of mystical experience. The highest mystical realization is generally referred to as "illumination", "enlightenment". Abhishiktānanda says, "Light is the sign par excellence of the Presence of God."[81] This light is often associated with the ascent of *kundalini* power into the *sahasrāra cakra.* For example, Gopi Krishna describes a light during his *kundalini* experience:

> Whenever I turned my mental eye upon myself I invariably perceived a luminous glow within and outside my head in a state of constant vibration, as if a jet of an extremely subtle and brilliant substance rising through the spine spread itself out in the cranium, filling and surrounding it with an indescribable radiance.[82]

Abhishiktānanda also connects his experience at Arunāchala with the *kundalini* experience and the ascent to the *sahasrāra*. When he was about to leave Arunāchala, he writes, "To light the lamp of the *sahasrāra*, you need a match."[83] Arunāchala was the match that started this light for him.

Was Abhishiktānanda describing what he hoped for or what he had already experienced? From other writings, we must conclude that he had not fully experienced what he was writing about. In March 1956, Abhishiktānanda describes his condition since his time at Arunāchala as a "dawn" before the light:

> … even before the sun rises, the sky is lit up. *Jyoti*, *shānti, ānanda* [light, peace, joy]. The birds are already singing, and my heart is already singing. Await with joy the appearance of the wonderful disk.[84]

Abhishiktānanda had experienced something of the inner light, but only a dawning. Again, he had experienced no more than a taste, or stage along the way:

> I think that to all our agonies there is only one real answer–that which is beyond concepts, in that mystery of the depth, which however only lights up for the one who has dared to penetrate into it by definitively passing beyond the whole level of sense and intellect, that is, the experience to which we are called by the *advaita*

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[81] Abhishiktānanda: "Abhishiktānanda on Aikiya Alayam" (Aikiya Alayam Series 4, 1975), p. 31.

[82] Gopi Krishna: *Kundalini: Evolutionary Energy in Man* (Shambhala, 1971), p. 87. See also Swami Muktananda: *The Play of Consciousness* (Campbell, Calif.: Shree Gurudev Ashram, 1974), p. 63.

[83] *Diary*, p. 69 (30.3.53). Once the match has been used, there is no further need for it; he could therefore leave Arunāchala.

[84] Cited in Introduction to *Secret*, p. x. Yet in *Diary*, p. 37 (6.4.52), he writes that one must get beyond even joy and peace, because if they are felt, one has not yet reached the inmost depth.

> of our rishis. Alas, I have not yet had the courage to place myself in the conditions for that experience. However, even its dawning is a blessing, and gives one a zest for life, whatever the turmoil on the surface.[85]

Thus, although Abhishiktānanda had some experience of an inner light, he himself recognized that this was not the complete *advaitic* experience.

f) Outside space and time

Abhishiktānanda refers to the *advaitic* experience of being "outside space and time." "In breaking down the fortress of the body, in penetrating within, I am beyond place and time."[86] He says on the same page that "the *aham* is the superficial ego liberated from the *upādhis* [superimposed limitations] of *idam* and *kālam*, of space-time." This state of being outside space and time appears to have been something that Abhishiktānanda had read about in the Upanishads. His descriptions at this time do not seem to indicate a direct experience by himself of that which is beyond time and space, but only a desire or a belief that this is what would occur in the *advaitic* experience.

g) Happiness and "Naturalness"

The high points of his whole life were at Arunāchala.[87] Abhishiktānanda felt happy and at peace as nowhere else. But Harilal told him that this joy and peace was something he was in fact projecting onto the cave.[88] True happiness and joy was something inward, unrelated to being in the cave.

While meditating on Arunāchala, Abhishiktānanda also experienced a greater sense of "naturalness":

> It is precisely the "naturalness" of my life at Arunāchala that has been my experience this year. Last year it was still something novel, more or less forced,

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[85] *Letters*, p. 99 (L.31.10.56).

[86] *Diary, p*. 42 (3.6.52).

[87] *Diary*, p. 70 (30.3.53).

[88] Abhishiktānanda: "Un Ermite de l'Inde, Harilal", *Revue Monchanin*, Vol. III, No. 5, 2-14, p. 7.

> perhaps conceptual. This year it has seemed to me so simple, so natural, so connatural, (*saha-ja*)….[89]

It must be emphasized that Abhishiktānanda's use of the word "natural" is not to be understood as a reference to a "nature" that is opposed to "grace" in the way that Olivier Lacombe described the *advaitic* experience. For Abhishiktānanda, the natural experience is not to be superceded by something else. This is also the teaching of Ramaṇa, that the *sahaja* experience is the culminating experience. Abhishiktānanda compares the natural state as the return to Paradise spoken of by the Greek Fathers and by Tauler.

h) Greater closeness to God

During his time in the caves, Abhishiktānanda also experienced a greater closeness to God. After several months in the cave, he wrote,

> This Arunāchala is strange–Never in my life have I felt so much at peace, so joyful, so near to God, or rather one with God, as on this mountain.[90]

Although he felt peace and joy, he regarded even this peace and joy as a hindrance to achieving the inmost depth:

> C'est oubli de tout que je veux,
> c'est le seul souvenir de Toi qu'il me faut,
> c'est la seule conscience de Toi,
> Ta propre conscience éternelle,
> dans une paix et une joie trop pures alors
> pour être ressentie comme mienne, dans l'essentiel.
>
> Forgetfulness of all is what I want,
> what I need is only the remembrance of You, only the consciousness of You,
> Your own eternal consciousness,
> in a peace and a joy that are then too pure
> to be felt as mine, in the one essential thing.[91]

Nearness to God does not necessarily imply a nondual experience if God is viewed as "Other". Indeed, in Hindu *advaitic* thought, devotion to God is on a lesser plane than a true

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[89] *Letters*, p. 64 (L. 29.4.53). The word '*sahaja'* means 'born with', from *'saha'* meaning 'with' and '*ja'* meaning 'born).

[90] *Letters*, p. 57 (F, 21.8.52).

[91] *La montée*, p. 57; *Diary*, p. 37 (6.4.52).

advaitic experience. However, Abhishiktānanda speaks not only of "nearness", but also of being "one with God". What Abhishiktānanda was moving towards, in theory if not in actuality, was a sense of "union" with God, or of non-difference between himself and God. It was at least a conceptual breakthrough for him to realize that there need be no separation between himself and God. He describes this conceptual breakthrough that he reached on Arunāchala:

> In my own innermost centre, in the most secret mirror of my heart, I tried to discover the image of him whose I am, of him who lives and reigns in the infinite space (*ākāśa*) of my heart. But the reflected image gradually grew faint, and soon it was swallowed up in the radiance of its Original. Step by step I descended into what seemed to me to be successive depths of my true self–my being, my awareness of being, and my joy in being. Finally nothing was left but he himself, the Only One, infinitely alone, Being, Awareness and Bliss, Saccidānanda. In the heart of Saccidānanda I had returned to my Source. *"Tat tvam asi*."[92]

And yet Abhishiktānanda worried about a total plunge into *advaita*. So although he wrote about Ramaṇa's idea of the plunge within, and of transcending his ego, he had not yet fully experienced it.[93] He retained his Christian beliefs as an anchor:

> It is precisely my long acquaintance with the liturgy and the Early Fathers that saves me from Shankara's *advaita*. *Advaita* is so overpowering! 'Disappearance in the One!'[94]

Abhishiktānanda's feeling of nearness to God, and union with God will be further explored in Chapter IX.

3. Gnānānanda

Abhishiktānanda had a further taste of *advaita* in his experience with Gnānānanda. He refers to "that experience [*anubhava*] which Swami Gnānānanda had let me glimpse."[95] Gnānānanda's emphasis was on meditation or *dhyāna*.

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[92] *Saccidananda*, p. 172.

[93] Vattakuzhy therefore oversimplifies when he says that Abhishiktānanda awakened to the mystery of non-duality at Arunāchala. Emmanuel Vattakuzhy: *Indian Christian Sannyāsa and Swami Abhishiktānanda* (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1981).

[94] *Letters*, p. 53 (L.10.2.52). Panikkar points out that Abhishiktānanda limited his dialogue to one particular form of Vedānta. See Panikkar, Introduction to *Diary*, p. xxiii. Why did Abhishiktānanda not consider Rāmānuja's doctrine of *Viśistadvaita*? In fact, as we shall see, Abhishiktānanda was aware of Rāmānuja's views of the Self, but he rejected them because he found them too dualistic.

[95] *Diary*, p. 162, (15.11.56).

Even before meeting Gnānānanda, Abhishiktānanda had taken lessons in yoga from a Swami across the river from Shantivanam. He learned control of breathing and concentration of thought while fixing attention on the space between the eyes.[96]

Although Gnānānanda emphasized the importance of meditation, he also said that meditation is not the goal of human life. The awakening is an experience of being, not just a practice of meditating:

> do not meditate–Be!
> do not think that you are–Be!
> don't think about being–*you are!*[97]

The purpose of meditation is to bring one to the awareness of being.

Abhishiktānanda also refers to Gnānānanda's *sahaja* (natural state of realization). He speaks of Gnānānanda's "radiant peace, the equability, equanimity, *samatva*."[98]

While with Gnānānanda, Abhishiktānanda experienced a kind of "waking sleep", a sleeping without sleeping. Ramaṇa also speaks of such "waking sleep" or *jagrat sushupti:*

> That is the state of the *jnani*. It is neither sleep nor waking but intermediate between the two. There is the awareness of the waking state and the stillness of sleep. It is called *jagrat-sushupti*. Call it wakeful sleep or sleeping wakefulness or sleepless waking or wakeless sleep. It is not the same as sleep or waking separately. It is *atijagrat* (beyond wakefulness) or *atisupshupti* (beyond sleep). It is the state of perfect awareness and of perfect stillness combined. It lies between sleep and waking; it is also the interval between two successive thoughts. It is the source from which thoughts spring…[99]

This is what Ramaṇa calls "Abiding in the Self". The Self is Witness in all of our states of consciousness, whether waking, sleeping or deep sleep.[100]

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[96] *Letters*, p. 44 (F.13.12.50).

[97] *Secret*, 73.

[98] *Diary*, p. 139, (14.1.56).

[99] Ramaṇa Maharshi: *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, pp. 563, 564. See also *Collected Works*, p. 94. On p. 139, Ramaṇa writes, "It [the Self] is the witness of the intellect in the waking, dream, and deep sleep states. It shines as "I-I", as ever-present, direct experience." See also *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*. At pp. 121 and 339, Ramaṇa identifies wakeful sleep with the state of *samadhi*. It is abiding in the Self. At p. 271 he identifies it with *mukti*.

[100] But this Witness does not imply an object and a subject to witness. The Witness is simple Being. Ramaṇa Maharshi: *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, pp. 150, 440.

For Gnānānanda, even the waking sleep stage is to be overcome. Gnānānanda told Abhishiktānanda to delve deeper until only pure awareness remains.[101] Thus, even the "waking sleep" experience is only a stage to the ultimate experience.[102]

4. Himalayas

In 1959, Abhishiktānanda made his first trip to the Himalayas. He records this pilgrimage in his book *The Mountain of the Lord*. In 1961 he acquired land at Uttarkashi for a hermitage; he spent much of his time here after he cut his ties with Shantivanam in 1968. Uttarkashi is the last stop on the way to Gangotri, the source of the Ganges. He found the Himalayas helpful for his inward journey of meditation: "Mountains concentrate you, limit your horizons, but make you go deep."[103]

In June, 1964, he and Panikkar spent three weeks in the Himalayas, making a pilgrimage to Gangotri. At Gangotri, Abhishiktānanda praised the acosmic life of total renunciation, the life led by the naked Hindu ascetics who remained there all year round in total silence. Panikkar asked him, "Then why not *you*, here and now? Abhishiktānanda felt sad since he had not achieved such total renunciation, and Panikkar felt that he had, perhaps, been too "logical."[104]

Panikkar left, and Abhishiktānanda spent three weeks alone at Uttarkashi. He did not have with him even a single book; it was a complete "fast of the mind", just a murmuring of OM.[105] In a poetic description written during this time he describes his desired union with God:

> Il n'y a pas de place en moi pour Dieu et pour moi à la fois. S'il y a Dieu, je ne suis pas; s'il y a moi, comment Dieu pourrait-il être? Dilemme de l'homme qu'il faut que lui ou bien Dieu disparaisse.

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[101] *Guru*, p. 99.

[102] Similarly, Wilber says that the stage of the Witness must itself be overcome. In the Witness stage, there is still a dualism between the witness and that that is witnessed. "It is when this last trace of dualism is finally and completely shattered that one awakens to Mind, for at that moment (which is *this* moment), the witness and the witnesses are one and the same." Ken Wilber: *The Spectrum of Consciousness*, (Quest, 1977), pp. 273-274.

[103] *Letters*, p. 146 (L.15.7.62).

[104] Raimon Panikkar: "Letter to Abhishiktānanda", p. 444.

[105] *Letters*, p. 162 (MT, 28.6.64).

> [There is no place in me for God and myself at the same time. If God is there, I do not exist; if there is myself, how could God exist? Dilemma of man for whom either he or God must disappear.][106]

This does not appear to be the record of a direct experience. It is rather more on the level of theory, dealing with the issue of identity in *advaita*. But it does show the desire for union that he had at the time.

E. The Advaitic Experiences in 1972–1973

Although Abhishiktānanda had "tastes" and "glimpses" of the *advaitic* experience, it was not until 1972 that he *knew* that this experience was true. We must therefore give more weight to the experiential expressions used by Abhishiktānanda after 1972. These experiences can be divided between those experiences with his disciple Marc Chaduc, and the experiences from and after Abhishiktānanda's heart attack.

1. Experiences with his disciple Marc Chaduc

a) Phūlchatti

In 1969, before Chaduc even arrived in India, Abhishiktānanda wrote to him: "Be concerned to be and not to do…or even to understand intellectually…Give a sabbatical year at least to your Mind!"[107]

They first met in October, 1971; they spent several days in deep discussions. They then went to Hardwar and Rishikesh. In November, Chaduc wanted to show Abhishiktānanda the small ashram of Phūlchatti he had discovered upstream from Rishikesh. Phūlchatti is a simple ashram for pilgrims on their way to Badrināth. They walked along the Ganges. In his own journal, Chaduc describes a strong spiritual experience:

> It was on the way to Phūlchatti that the grace erupted. In these mountains which have sheltered so many contemplatives, overwhelmed by the interior vision, the Father was seized by the mystery of the purely acosmic one who leaves all in response to the burning invitation of God. The blessed one who receives this

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[106] Cited in Introduction to *Intériorité*, p. 16 (June, 1964 at Gangotri).

[107] *Letters*, p. 219 (MC 29.9.69).

> light, the Father told me, is paralysed, torn asunder, he can no longer speak nor think, he remains there, immobile outside of time and space, alone in the very solitude of the Alone. Absorbed in this way, the Father relived–lived again–the sudden eruption of the infinite Column of fire and of the light of Arunāchala, that myth which was the source of that interior awakening which had flashed forth in him in 1953. For a brief moment, he could only stagger under the excess of the interior drunkenness, and I had to support him. At that very moment there opened within myself an abyss which had been hidden to that point. Later we realized that this experience was the beginning of the *mauna-diksha*, the initiation by silence which is the work of the Spirit alone. One does not have any awareness of being *guru*; if words spring forth, they come from the source […], a communion of infinite purity with the mystery of the non-dual Spirit, a regard which passes from depth to depth.[108]

These are Chaduc's words, not Abhishiktānanda's. But they are a valuable record of what occurred, especially in view of the fact that we do not have the complete *Diary* of Abhishiktānanda for that same period. Did Abhishiktānanda himself have an *advaitic* experience? Abhishiktānanda had described to Chaduc what he had written about in the caves at Arunāchala—the state of being outside of time and space, alone in the very solitude of the Alone. Chaduc understood from Abhishiktānanda that the experience is one that "erupts", and "overwhelms". It is "sudden", and "flashes forth". It is an "interior awakening". There is reference to "fire" and "light". There is a "mystery" of the "acosmic" one who is outside of time and space. And there is reference to "silence", which was also Ramaṇa's principal means of teaching.

But is it true to say that Abhishiktānanda re-lived with Chaduc an interior awakening that had first flashed forth in 1953? We must recall that Abhishiktānanda's own testimony is that he had not achieved the *advaitic* experience at Arunāchala, but only tastes of the experience. It seems that he was re-living those *glimpses* of the inner light. He clearly had some kind of experience, since Chaduc saw him "stagger under the excess of the interior drunkenness." Abhishiktānanda himself wrote about the impact or blow of this experience: "blows like Phūlchatti cause the experience of Arunāchala to vibrate unbearably".[109]

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[108] Odette Baumer-Despeigne: "The Spiritual Way of Henri Le Saux Swami Abhishiktānanda", *Bulletin of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue*, 1993, vol. 48, Oct., p. 22.

[109] *Letters*, p. 272 (MC, 16.6.72).

In Panikkar's opinion, the real reason for Abhishiktānanda's joy may be just the fact of having a disciple, a "son" of his own. After Abhishiktānanda's many renunciations, having a disciple represented a turn towards humanness, away from an acosmic interpretation of *advaita*.[110] Panikkar writes:

> He who had dreamed of being a solitary, an acosmic, but without attaining to it, and therefore was tormented with guilt–this *sannyāsī* discovered all the human warmth of a personal, concrete and living relationship. All his abstract theories collapsed and were reborn afresh in the concrete. […] This fatherhood, this love for his spiritual son, which I would call profoundly human, was what in his last stage fulfilled him.[111]

Panikkar says that the unpublished diary of Chaduc proves this.[112] Chaduc probably omitted from his selection of Abhishiktānanda's diary details of the guru-disciple relationship.

This view that Abhishiktānanda was fulfilled by the *guru*-disciple relationship seems to be confirmed by a later letter from Abhishiktānanda to Chaduc from Gyansu about the November experience:

> This non-dual dyad of which I spoke in *Gnānānanda*, we have lived out with such intensity. In discovering you as son, I have found myself.[113]

Some of Abhishiktānanda's writings about this non-dual with his disciple Chaduc are almost erotic in tone, such as this letter to Chaduc:

> A total depth of exchange in the present moment. Then eternity of this exchange lived in the present…For every exchange, every kiss, is the mystery of the not-two, when it is lived in its total purity and without a trace of 'making use of' the other.[114]

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[110] Panikkar: "A Letter to Abhishiktananda", *Studies in Formative Spirituality* (Pittsburgh, Duquesne University) 3 (1982), n. 3, pp. 448, 449.

[111] Panikkar, Introduction to *Diary*, p. xxvii.

[112] *Ibid.*, p. xxviii.

[113] Odette Baumer-Despeigne: "The Spiritual Way of Henri Le Saux Swami Abhishiktānanda", Bulletin of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue, 1993, vol. 48, Oct., p. 22.

[114] *Letters*, p. 292 (MC 4.4.73).

The realization that there are not-two (*advaita*) was momentarily focussed in their own relationship. There was a nonduality between them both. "I am now following you; or better, I am you here, and you are I there.”[115]

Both Abhishiktānanda and Chaduc had profound experiences at this time in November, 1971. But it is unlikely that these can be considered to be a full *advaitic* experience for either of them. Chaduc speaks of an “abyss” opening within himself. These are the words that Abhishiktānanda used when describing his experience with Ramaṇa.[116] Perhaps Abhishiktānanda told him about that, too. Something happened to Chaduc, just like something happened to Abhishiktānanda when he met Ramaṇa. But in both cases, the experience was only a glimpse, one stage of the *advaitic* experience.

b) Feast of the Ascension

From May 1 to 20, 1972, Abhishiktānanda and Chaduc spent three weeks again at Phūlchatti where they studied the Upanishads together. It was on May 10, 1972, during a vigil on the day of the Feast of Ascension in the Christian calendar, that Chaduc had a profound spiritual experience that resolved Abhishiktānanda’s doubts about *advaita*. Chaduc experienced an illumination that was also a kind of death. He describes the experience on that day, which was also his 28th birthday:

> A sudden and overwhelming vision of the *param jyotir*, of the Great Light for three hours; engulfing the total depths of myself, in the ineffable Light which I am. An experience of annihilating, beatifying death, an awakening to Self! At the same time I had the definitive revelation that Henri (Le Saux) is my *guru*. I saw him in his blinding glory, transfigured in this Light. But he experienced the terrible anguish of not knowing if I was going to “return”, and if so, if it would be with all my faculties […] This Light of “great death” overwhelmed both of us equally.[117]

Again there are references to light: “Great Light”, “ineffable Light’. But unlike Abhishiktānanda’s references to light in his experiences in the cave, Chaduc’s reference to light

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[115] *Letters*, p. 256 (MC 6.12.71).

[116] *Secret*, pp. 8-9.

[117] Odette Baumer-Despeigne: “The Spiritual Way of Henri Le Saux Swami Abhishiktānanda”, *Bulletin of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue*, 1993, vol. 48, Oct., p. 22.

seem to be more than metaphor. Chaduc actually had a vision that lasted for three hours. He says that the Light overwhelmed them both equally. However, it is not clear whether Abhishiktānanda also experienced the same vision, or whether he was overcome by Chaduc's vision. Other evidence suggests the latter interpretation.

Chaduc says that he realized at that time that Abhishiktānanda was his *guru*. His description of Abhishiktānanda's "blinding glory" seems to refer to the description of Jesus' transfiguration.[118] Just as the disciples saw the glory of Jesus, so Chaduc sees the glory in Abhishiktānanda.

Chaduc speaks of an "annihilating death" in relation to "an awakening". His experience of illumination was a kind of death; he was so deeply plunged that Abhishiktānanda feared he would not 'return', and Abhishiktānanda says that he had to exercise all his authority as *guru* to summon him back.[119] It seems clear that Chaduc's experience was a kind of near death experience.

The next day, Abhishiktānanda reflected on this experience in his *Diary*. He writes that he *knows* that the experience of the Upanishads is true.[120] This statement is interesting. For one thing, Abhishiktānanda does not speak of the experience as being "immediate"; rather, he interprets the experience by the Upanishads. This is in accordance with the Yogic Model of Experience, which begins with concepts but moves beyond them. The experience is pointed to by the Upanishads, but the experience is on another level.

Abhishiktānanda wrote to a friend about Chaduc's experience:

> I understood there [at Phūlchatti] that the Upanishad is a secret which is only properly given in the secret of the communication of the *guru* to the disciple.[121]

But what is interesting here is that Chaduc, the disciple, experienced *advaita* before Abhishiktānanda had himself experienced it! Chaduc's experience of death and life was only

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[118] Matt. 17:2.

[119] *Letters*, p. 266.

[120] *Diary*, p. 348 (11.5.72).

[121] Odette Baumer-Despeigne: "The Spiritual Way of Henri Le Saux Swami Abhishiktānanda", *Bulletin of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue*, 1993, vol. 48, Oct., p. 22. May 22/72.

experienced vicariously by Abhishiktānanda. A month later, after he had returned to Gyansu, Abhishiktānanda writes:

> I continue to remember (as if it was my own) your experience. This morning it was so powerful during the Mass. It left me with a breathlessness which I still have at noon.[122]

Abhishiktānanda did not himself have the experience that Chaduc described. He only had a vicarious experience of Chaduc's experience, "as if it were" his own. Murray Rogers, a friend of Abhishiktānanda, is also of the opinion that what happened here was an experience for Chaduc. What Abhishiktānanda had been hoping for for years had happened to Chaduc immediately.[123]

For the disciple to have an *advaitic* experience before his *guru* has the experience is contrary to the entire *guru* model in India. The tradition says that there is a direct transmission from a *guru* who has had the *advaitic* experience to the disciple who has not. That was also Abhishiktānanda's own understanding of the *guru* relation. As early as 1952 he wrote that people only find the way to God with the help of someone who knows it by personal experience. The true *guru* is himself realized, and can therefore penetrate to the soul of his disciple.[124] "One can transmit only what one has oneself. No one can awaken a sleeper if one is asleep oneself."[125] How did Abhishiktānanda explain this inversion of that relation? How could the secret of the Upanishads be transmitted by one who had not yet experienced it? Abhishiktānanda uses Christian imagery to explain this inverted *guru*-disciple relation! He tries to explain it by a reference to the Trinity. Jesus the Son reveals the depth of being in the Father. Until the Son appears, the depths of the Father are not known.

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[122] *Letters*, p. 270.

[123] This is the view of Murray Rogers, as said to Visvanathan: *An Ethnography of Mysticism: The Narratives of Abhishiktānanda, a French Monk in India* (Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1998), p. 86. Abhishiktānanda says that Chaduc seized the experience with the radicality of his age. Abhishiktānanda says it was an experience of both joy and anguish. *Lettres d'un sannyāsī chrétien à Joseph Lemarié*, p. 407 (28.8.72).

[124] *Diary*, p. 31 (3.4.52).

[125] Abhishiktānanda: "The Priest for Whom India Waits, for whom the World Waits" (1964), *Eyes of Light*, 108. See also "The Upanishads, an Introduction", *Further Shore* p. 62: "He alone can pass on this experience who has known it himself, who has been awakened, within, the *evaṃvid*, he who knows *thus."* And in "Communication in the Spirit", Abhishiktānanda says, "The guru must be *brahmanishta,* established in the knowledge and experience of Brahman (Mund. Up. 1,2:12)."

> dans le fond du Père le Fils
> dans le fond du fils le Père
> dans deux mains qui s'étreignent
> le mystère du Père et du Fils.
> Jésus a révélé le fond de Dieu, de l'Etre.
>
> in the depth of the Father the Son
> in the depth of the Son the Father
> in two hands that clasp each other
> the unique mystery of the Father and the Son.
> Jesus has revealed the depth of God, of Being.[126]

In this case, Chaduc, his "child" had engendered the experience in Abhishiktānanda, his "father".[127] Abhishiktānanda wrote the following in connection with Chaduc's experience: "The Lord has said to me: *Today* I beget you."[128] Panikkar summarizes Abhishiktānanda's idea of the Trinity, which he realized for himself in his relation of *guru* to his disciple Chaduc:

> The I cannot experience Itself in a logical identity: the I (subject) of the experience becomes the myself (object). The Myself implies already the Thou, the Logos, the Son, the *advitīyam.* There has to be an other, *alius* not *aliud*, namely the Son, who "causes the birth" of the Father, as we might say in a paradox, "when" the Father gives birth to the Son.[129]

Until his *guru*-disciple relationship with Chaduc, Abhishiktānanda had not had this Incarnation experience, the experience of Fatherhood in bringing forth the Son, of being a *guru* in time and space, in flesh and blood.

In the May 11, 1972 entry in his *Diary* where he describes Chaduc's experience, Abhishiktānanda also makes references to the Trinity. He refers to the Father and the Son, and to the Resurrection. He writes,

> Et je sais que ce que j'ai enseigné dans *Sagesse* est vrai,
> même si mal exprimé.
> La Trinité à tous les échelons,
> profondeur des profondeurs

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[126] *La* montée, p. 425; Diary, p. 348 (11.5.72).

[127] See William Wordsworth's poem, "My Heart Leaps Up When I Behold" (1802), where he says, "The child is father of the man." Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote a poem on this subject in 1918. Abhishiktānanda says in "Dans Le Centre Le Plus Profond", *Guhāntara* (unpublished): "Le Fils fait être le Père. Le Père fait être le Fils."

[128] *Diary*, p. 349 (11.5.72).

[129] Raimon Panikkar: Introduction to *Diary*, p. xxvii.

réel du réel: *satyasya satyam*
[…] qui habite une lumière inaccessible.

And I know that what I have taught in *Sagesse* [*Saccidananda*} is true, even if badly expressed,
The Trinity at every level,
the depth of every deep,
the Real of the real, *satyasya satyam*
…who dwells in unapproachable light. [1 Tim. 6:16][130]

This is a remarkable interweaving of Hindu Upanishadic themes and Biblical themes. The light of awakening is compared to Biblical references to light. The idea of the Trinity is related to every level of the whole world as it arises from the Real. In *Saccidānanda*, Abhishiktānanda says that just as Christ comes from the Father by the Spirit, the manifested world comes from *Brahman* by his *śakti*. The world as such is also real, just as Christ is real. This is reminiscent of Ramaṇa's views on the reality of the world as set out in the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi,* that all is *Brahman.* This view of the reality of the world is confirmed by the same *Diary* entry of May 11:

In the light of the *ātman*, (of *Brahman*, Mund. Up. III, 1,1) all relationships between beings (the whole gift of self to the self of each being: food, *annam*) are pure being, being itself, unique being. There are no things that would be added together and would coexist separately in the area of that light. They are not distinguished from that light, from that being, and yet they are for one another,

in the depth of the Father the son
in the depth of the Son the Father
in two hands that clasp each other
the unique mystery of the Father and the Son
Jesus has revealed the depth of God, of Being

He has reached that light–*tejas*–in the bosom of the Father, in his ascension with his body, *saśarīrah*; at his bodily death he reached it beyond death. He resumed his body again–beyond that detachment of the Purusha from (in) this body of mortal flesh. For it is at the boundary of the *śarīra* that we meet the Supreme [*uttamah*] Purusha.

The Resurrection is *jīvanmukti*.

In the light of Brahman the world is a mystery of threeness, an interweaving of trinities.

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[130]*La montée*, pp. 425, 426; *Diary*, p. 349 (11.5.72). It is interesting that here Abhishiktānanda affirms what he wrote in *Saccidānanda*, whereas less than a year later he said that the whole Trinitarian thesis in *Saccidānanda* had collapsed. (*Diary*, p. 369, 2.2.73). And yet even after this later date, Abhishiktānanda interpreted his experience with Chaduc in a trinitarian manner.

It is the *world* that is a mystery of threeness. The world is not illusion. Rather, all relationships between beings (the plural manifested reality) are pure being. They are "not distinguished from that light" and yet "they are for one another". This is an example of Abhishiktānanda's view of non-monistic *advaita*. The beings are not distinguished from the Unmanifested, and yet they still are for one another, in relation to one another.

The reference to the *Purusha* gives a personal aspect to the experience. He says on the same page,

> I have come to know that mighty Person, golden like the sun, beyond all darkness. By knowing Him a man transcends death; there is no other path for reaching that goal.[131]

This *Purusha* is "the golden embryo" of all. The *Purusha* is unborn but comes in every birth. The *Purusha* is his own light (B IV, 3,6). There is an "explosion" of the "sun" when *Purusha* reveals himself:

> Oh! quand il se découvre,
> quand le soleil explose,
> la fin du monde
> alors Je suis.
>
> Oh! when he reveals himself,
> when the sun explodes,
> the end of the world,
> then I am.

A further reference in this description is also important for this thesis. He refers to this striving to the *Purusha* as the "aspiration" towards the *sahasrāra*. This is the thousand-petalled lotus in *Kundalini* yoga. The *sahasrāra* is the *cakra* at the crown of the head.[132]

Bettina Bäumer refers to this 'mystical outburst" by Abhishiktānanda. She links his "I know" to the connection (or "upanishad") that Abhishiktānanda makes between the ascension of Jesus, the ascension of the *Purusha* in the Chandogya Upanishad, and the yogic 'ascension' to the *sahasrāra*.[133] The idea of the *sahasrāra cakra* was not something new for Abhishiktānanda.

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[131] *Diary*., p. 348 (11.5.73). The reference is to SU II, 8.

[132] *Diary*, p. 349 (11.5.72).

[133] Vandana (ed.): *Swami Abhishiktānanda: The Man and his Teachings* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1986), p. 18.

He referred to it when he first meditated in the caves of Arunāchala. But he is here making connections with other doctrines and ideas.

Even if Abhishiktānanda himself had had only a vicarious experience, he was profoundly affected by Chaduc's experience. The experience convinced him of the reality of *advaita*. He wrote to Chaduc about it:

> I don't know when I shall recover from that Phūlchatti, which was lived by both of us at a depth of which even your ecstasy was only a quasi-external sign.…now I do know, *vedāham*![134]

It is Chaduc who had the ecstasy. Abhishiktānanda says that this ecstasy (which he apparently did not have) was "only a quasi-eternal sign" of something deeper that they both experienced. That experience seems to have been the nonduality between them both as *guru* and disciple.

Abhishiktānanda also wrote about Chaduc's experience in a letter to Odette Baumer-Despeigne:

> For the moment, it is necessary "to return" from Phūlchatti and for the body to regain itself. It is too overpowering to feel oneself in the presence of the True, and how can one express in words that which words would only betray.[135]

Five days later, he wrote Odette Baumer-Despeigne again about the experience. He described the time with Chaduc as:

> …days of extraordinary fullness, even if physically devastating for me. All that I have said now seems to me off the point, so academic. What is important in the Upanishads are the 'correlations', which go beyond all the words employed and pierce the living flesh like electric shocks [*comme des* flash?] Neither books nor lectures can convey this experience. You have to awake to another level of awareness. […] I now *know* that the Upanishad is true, *satyam*. I would like Marc to live it so deeply beyond the 'names and forms' that he may be able to repeat it in Europe, stripped of all its exotic oriental trappings and springing directly from the Source.[136]

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[134] *Letters*, p. 270 (MC, 3.6.72).

[135] Odette Baumer-Despeigne: "The Spiritual Way of Henri Le Saux Swami Abhishiktānanda", *Bulletin of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue*, 1993, vol. 48, Oct., p. 23, (22.5.73). *Diary*, p. 348 11.5.72 refers to SU , III, 8: "I have come to know that mighty Person, golden like the sun, beyond all darkness."

[136] *Letters*, p. 268 (OB, 28.5.72).

c) The night of Pentecost

During the same three-week period in May, 1972, Chaduc had another experience–this time on the roof of Sivānanda Ashram. It was on the night of May 27-28. He called it "the night of Pentecost". The experience "shattered" them; they were unable to celebrate Mass the next morning.[137] Abhishiktānanda writes of the experiencing a "shuddering as if some force was carrying me off… as a horse shakes off dust from its hair."[138]

Abhishiktānanda says he did not physically recover from what he had seen in this *upadesha* [teaching] of fire.[139] Abhishiktānanda speaks of this experience in terms of "light", "fire", "spark" and "flash".

> *Jyotis-sampanna* [all changed into light, merged in light}–*tejas-sampanna* [all changed into glory]. How keep going after that? What reading can be "interesting" what company can be interesting?[140]

Abhishiktānanda says that there is nothing further to do except to bear witness to the fullness of light.[141] It is pure light, supreme light [*param jyoti], pure sun [āditya*]. Hindu terms for light are compared to Biblical terms:

> *Tejas*, glory, is the *doxa* of the Gospel, the *qabod* of the Bible. To come near to it burns you, *cornutus Moses* [shining of Moses' face]. […] The great lesson of the Upanishads: that brightness, the *tejas* of Being…which burns, swallows up in the Self. The immense place given to the Sun–and also to Agni and the lightning [*vidyut*] in worship and thought comes precisely from this intuition of light, *jyoti*, *tejas*, within the heart.[142]

It is the Light of the world, the rays of the sun, Supreme light, and joyful light. "God is too great a light for one to hold out in his presence. One vanishes. Absorbed in the Source who is *jyotih* [light]."[143] It is an experience of *Purusha* shining as the self in the depth of oneself.[144] It is the

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[137] *Letters*, p. 267.

[138] *Diary*, p. 268 (OB, 28.5.72).

[139] *Ibid.*

[140] *Diary*, p. 355 (2.6.72).

[141] *Diary* p. 355 (10.6.72).

[142] *Diary*, pp. 355, 356 (10.6.72).

[143] *Diary* p. 359 (3.8.72).

[144] *Diary* p. 360 (29.8.72).

burning heat that is at the origin of everything.[145] It is a return of the human being to the light that shines of itself [*svayam jyoti*].[146] He compares the experience to a Light that empties, annihilates, and fulfils one.

But Abhishiktānanda also mentions that this is sometimes experienced only in a "glimpse":

> Of the fire that I am, of the fire that anyone is who has even had only a glimpse of Brahman. A fire that burns–slowly perhaps but inexorably–in all the *nāmarūpas* [names and forms] of whoever comes near him. ----Christianity is first of all upanishad, correlation, not direct teaching. Correlation causes the spark of experience [*anubhava*] to flash, that alone gives fulfilment.[147]

On May 29, Abhishiktānanda writes to his sister about the experience:

> I burn with the desire to make this known, to communicate this interior burning, an uncontrollable, burning and transforming presence. This communication takes place directly from spirit to spirit, in the silence of the Spirit.[148]

In June, Abhishiktānanda writes to Chaduc:

> I need time in order to assimilate the Light experienced at Phūlchatti, this sudden and earthshaking vision. Christianity is an explosion of the Spirit […] The words which I am able to speak to you have validity more by their resonance than their immediate meaning.[149]

This experience with Chaduc inspired Abhishiktānanda to write the *Introduction to the Upanishads*.[150]

In June, 1972 Abhishiktānanda starts to have periods of breathlessness.[151] This is probably evidence of his heart problems at the time. He writes of the impossibility of taking any real interest in anything whatever. He reports that his mind could keep quiet, and that he could neither meditate nor practise *japa* (prayer, *mantra*).

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[145] *Diary*, p. 376 (17.4.73).

[146] *Ibid.*

[147] *Diary*, p. 351 (28.5.72).

[148] Odette Baumer-Despeigne: "The Spiritual Way of Henri Le Saux Swami Abhishiktānanda", *Bulletin of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue*, 1993, vol. 48, Oct., p. 23, (22.5.73).

[149] *Ibid.*

[150] This is included as part of *The Further Shore*.

[151] *Diary*, p. 355 (10.6.72).

Later in 1972, Abhishiktānanda was able to resume meditation. He writes,

> Just like yoga, the various kinds of *dhāranā-dhyāna* (concentration, meditation) have their own value as methods, as instruments, but to absolutize them, even to absolutize them simply as methods, is to fall into the trap of *māyā*. In *sati* [Buddhist mindfulness?] there is no more than a succession of '*happenings*'. Is there still an observer [*sākshī*] who knows that there are '*happenings*'? It is just "that", *tad*, which remains, *avaśishyate*![152]

In January, 1973, Abhishiktānanda writes that human beings need *zazen*, meditation, silence, just as they need sleep.[153]

In February, 1973, there is a reference in a letter to Chaduc which seems to confirm that Abhishiktānanda himself had not yet had an authentic *advaitic* experience:

> There is something which I have the impression of having grasped, but without being able to express it. Nothing new, even so. There has been nothing new since Arunāchala, twenty years ago. But the mind seems to be always carried a little further on, it is like the landings on a staircase–or so it seems.[154]

If there had been "nothing new since Arunāchala", this would mean that Abhishiktānanda had not himself had the *advaitic* experience. There are landings on a staircase, levels towards the experience, but not the experience itself. He may have been vicariously thrilled with Chaduc's experiences, which he envied. His letters from April, 1973 seem to confirm that he had not yet attained the experience. In April, Abhishiktānanda writes to Chaduc that the duality which we assert between *advaita* and *dvaita* is precisely a mistake."[155] He seems to be using the Māhāyana Buddhist doctrine that *samsāra* is *nirvana*. He says that there is no time when one is realized, and that there is no distinction between *advaita* and *dvaita.*

> Whoever expects an "experience", so that he can say that he is "realized", knows nothing about anything. There is nothing to be renounced, nothing to be released from,…*Dhyāna* [meditation] is not a means. For there is no means–neither meditation nor rite nor *gnosis* nor *guru* nor scripture […] So long as *mokśa*,

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[152] *Diary*, p. 361, (1.11.72). This is a reference to the mantra of fullness from BU V, 1 and IsaU: "That is fullness, this is Fullness, from Fullness comes Fullness. When Fullness is taken from Fullness, Fullness remains [*avaśishyate]*" [Panikkar's translation, *The Vedic Experience*, p. 806).

[153] *Diary*, p. 367 (3.1.73).

[154] *Letters*, pp. 285, 286 (MC, 1.2.73).

[155] *Letters*, p. 293 (MC, 12.4.73).

> *ātman, brahman, nirvana*, is still thought of as some thing, you are going away from it even while looking for it.[156]

Abhishiktānanda's *Diary* records the same view that one should not seek "realization":

> Pay no attention to the idea of being realized or to that of not being realized. All that steadily inflates the ego. So long as I think of an ego that has to be transcended or annihilated, I am simply feeding it! The *sādhana* for *moksha* lies simply in the stopping [*nivritti*] of the *manas.*[157]

Harilal had told Abhishiktānanda that "the fundamental obstacle to realization is precisely the notion that this realization is still awaited."[158] Abhishiktānanda was now facing this truth. But the fact that he had to consciously reject the goal of realization also means that he himself had not yet experienced it. In April, 1973, Abhishiktānanda writes,

> To speak of a time to come–to hope for it–when I will be "realized" is absolutely meaningless. …To desire salvation [*moksha*] is a false word at the level of the Absolute [*paramārtha*]. Pay no attention either to the idea of being realized or to that of not being realized. All that steadily inflates the ego. So long as I think of an ego that has to be transcended or annihilated, I am simply feeding it.[159]

This is the paradox of the meditative practice. Realization is not attained as long as it is sought. But to say that there is no realization is only true *at the level of the Absolute*. That does not mean that seeking realization is false at the level of the relative. Until we have obtained realization there is a goal to be achieved, the "further shore" of the heart.[160] As Ramaṇa said, "One must ferry over to the shore of Liberation that Self which is immersed in the ocean of *samsāra."*[161] But this "further shore" is only further in relation to this shore.[162] In other words, the truth that *samsāra* is *nirvana* is only known after realization. Abhishiktānanda recognized this when he said that to say [at the relative level] that there is no realization can be a "counsel of despair" to one who has not achieved it:

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[156] *Letters*, p. 296 (MC, 23.4.73).

[157] *Diary*, p. 377 (19.4.73).

[158] *Secret*, p. 82. Harilal said that he neither read books nor meditated.

[159] *Diary*, p. 377 (19.4.73).

[160] *Diary*, p. 284.

[161] *Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, p. 129.

[162] *Diary*, p. 295 (22.9.67).

> A Ramaṇa, a Buddha are extremely rare events in history. So we console ourselves by saying that no one ever awakes, there is only the One who is Awake. Surely that is a counsel of despair? Just as much as that of Ecclesiastes (Qoheleth) or the Epicureans? The truly practical, *existential*, answer is that of the Gospel. Unfortunately we have so covered it up (*adhyāsa*) with myths and theological gnosis. . .or on the other hand, as in these days, we have so emptied it of its mystery, the Real. . .(…) This deep Reality is there, *nihito guhāyām* [hidden in the cave of the heart], beyond the heavens, and *I* know it, but *manas* [mind] does not know that I know it and yet well knows that if *I* did not know it, it could not itself even say, I do not know.[163]

What is going on here? Abhishiktānanda is obviously wrestling with the fact that he has not yet attained the *advaitic* experience. What does he mean by the reference to the Gospel providing the truly practical, existential answer? Is he again looking to Christianity to provide some of his answers? From this time, Christian imagery begins to play a larger role for him, especially imagery about the prophet Elijah.

d) Chaduc's *dīkshā*

Abhishiktānanda and Chaduc found themselves together again at Phūlchatti from May 12 to June 27, 1973. From June 4-10 they were together at Rishikesh and Haridwār. Abhishiktānanda writes Panikkar that "everything explodes when you have reached the fourth *mātra* of OM […] Everything explodes, everything goes away, and then what is left? *Etad val tad*; That, just that!"[164]

From June 27 to 30 they were at Rishikesh for Chaduc's *dīkshā*. In the previous chapter we saw how Abhishiktānanda envied Chaduc's experience at the *dīkshā* and the fact that Chaduc was able to go off on his own. Abhishiktānanda felt that Chaduc had left him, "not just physically, but that he has passed into a sphere of the sacred to which I have no access".[165] This again suggests that Chaduc had had an experience that Abhishiktānanda himself had not. Abhishiktānanda confirms this in the same diary entry: "The one who was after me has gone ahead." This seems to be a reference to John the Baptist at the baptism of Jesus, where John acknowledged that Jesus was greater than himself. Abhishiktānanda also saw this *dīkshā* in

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[163] *Letters*, pp. 295, 296 (MC, 21.4.73).

[164] *Letters*, p. 301 (RP 25.6.73). This is a refrain form the Katha Upanishad.

[165] *Diary*, p. 382 (3.7.73).

terms of Elijah—that he had united Chaduc with a tradition that went back to the Desert Fathers and behind that to Elijah.[166] After Chaduc's *dīkshā*, Abhishiktānanda wrote this poem:

> Tu n'es plus seulement l'enfant
> né de moi
> que j'aime follement
> mais tu fus transfiguré
> comme je le fus aux tiens.
> En toi j'ai le *darshana*
> du Non-Né.
> *Ajata.*
> Ta *diksha* comme ton envoie de mai
> m'a fait frissonner jusqu'au fond de l'être
> m'enlevant à moi-même
> me perdant aux espaces infinis
> où je ne sais plus rien
> où je me cherche en vain.
> OM.

This has been translated as

> You are no longer the child
> begotten by me
> whom I love extravagantly
> but you were transfigured before my eyes
> as I was before yours.
> In you I have had *darshana*
> of the Unbegotten
> *Ajata.*
> Your *diksha*
> as your flight of May
> shook me to the depths of my being
> stripping me of myself
> losing myself in infinite spaces
> where I no longer know anything
> where I search in vain. OM [167]

It was in Chaduc that Abhishiktānanda had a vision of the Unbegotten; Chaduc had been transfigured before him. It was Chaduc's *dīkshā* and his "flight of May" [1972?] that had shaken Abhishiktānanda to the depths of his being. It was not Abhishiktānanda's own experience.

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[166] *Letters*, p. 303 (FT, 6.7.73).

e) Ranagal

In July, 1973, 10 days after Chaduc's *dīkshā*, Abhishiktānanda met Chaduc by 'chance' in a hermitage at Kaudiyālā near Rishikesh. Abhishiktānanda had been considering acquiring this hermitage, since Gyansu was becoming hard for him to reach. Abhishiktānanda and Chaduc took refuge from a thunderstorm in a small deserted Shaivite temple which Chaduc had discovered on the other side of the Ganges at Ranagal. They spent three days there without food. Abhishiktānanda says that they were in a state of high experience, in what can only be called a "holy inebriation" like the *keshi* of the Ṛg Veda.[168] He also says that these days in the jungle were so spiritually powerful that his body could not stand up to it.[169]

Chaduc records these events in his diary:

> During these few days Swamiji [Abhishiktānanda] was as if driven by a force which went beyond him. They were lived out through certain great symbols such as the taking up of the Prophet Elias in his fiery chariot, that of *Dakshinamurti*, the manifestation of Shiva as a young *guru* teaching by his silence, or finally the myth of the Column of fire which had neither base nor summit of Arunachal-Shiva.
>
> On July 11, under the influence of the Spirit, there issued from the mouth of the Father, unexpectedly, words which stammered the inexpressible, suggesting that he who was after had been before, without being either after or before; that there was no longer either master or disciple […] What was spoken cannot be remembered […]
>
> Suddenly a flash of lightning illumined the nearby mountain and in this light Swamiji lived again the irruption of the Column of fire and light of Shiva-Arunachala. The very depths of his being shook and trembled to the point of snapping […] The rain fell in torrents, it ran down to the *mandir*. We remained seated for a long time in silence. An extraordinary power emanated from everything. Finally we curled up as best we could to pass the long night around the *linga* (the upright stone which is a symbol of Shiva). On July 12, as dawn appeared, it continued to rain. A power–a *shakti*–of total despoilment reigned in this place, man could no longer cover himself with any rag, there was nothing other than the Absolute who shone forth in his dazzling radiance. Still under the

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[167] Odette Baumer-Despeigne: *"Cheminement spirituel d'Henri Le Saux: Textes inédits"*, *La Vie Spirituelle* (1990) v. 691 (Sept.-Oct.), pp. 531-543, translated as "The Spiritual Way of Henri Le Saux Swami Abhishiktānanda", *Bulletin of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue*, 1993, vol. 48, Oct., pp. 20-25..(Two verses of a long poem).

[168] *Letters*, p. 305.

[169] *Letters*, p. 308 (MR 6.8.73).

> influence of the numinous which radiated the *mandir*, Swamiji intoned the *OM* in such a way as to make resonant the silence of the fourth syllable […][170]

This was certainly a numinous experience, as Chaduc says. Was it also an *advaitic* experience? It was obviously a very moving experience for Abhishiktānanda. Chaduc says that Abhishiktānanda trembled to the very depths of his being. What is the meaning of the strange words spoken by Abhishiktānanda about he who was after had been before? Is this not the same reference to Chaduc who had in some sense been "before" Abhishiktānanda's own experience? Again, it is by no means clear that Abhishiktānanda himself had the experience he sought, although it was certainly a profound experience for him.

Chaduc writes about what occurred the next day:

> More and more I understood that this "mystery" is the unique and non-dual mystery which resides within the heart of each one of both of us and which reveals itself in the depths of our relation of *guru* to disciple, and still more of father to son. The mystery of the *guru*-disciple communion touched at its culminating point this profound mystery of the son who "engenders" the father, in the very act in which the father engenders the son as his own, with both awakening the Unbegotten.[171]

This is a very explicit reference to the vicarious nature of Abhishiktānanda's experience. It is the disciple, the son, who engenders the father. It is through Chaduc's experience that Abhishiktānanda has the experience.

On July 14, Abhishiktānanda went to Rishikesh to shop for provisions. He said words that sounded like a final farewell to Chaduc.

> When he left me, the words of farewell were more forceful than usual, and his features were again transfigured. I will never forget his last words: "Even though I depart, I will never leave you. I am always with you."[172]

These words are similar to those that the Gospel records for Jesus at his ascension.[173] They are also similar to words said by Ramaṇa: "Bhagavan is always with you, in you and you

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[170] Odette Baumer-Despeigne: "The Spiritual Way of Henri Le Saux Swami Abhishiktānanda", Bulletin of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue, 1993, vol. 48, Oct., p. 23.

[171] *Ibid.* p. 24.

[172] *Ibid.* p. 24.

[173] Matt. 28:20.

are yourself Bhagavān."[174] Abhishiktānanda says that his farewell to Chaduc took the form of the great departure, *mahāprasthāna*. He was freeing Chaduc from his state of discipleship, making him a "Master".[175]

Abhishiktānanda had had a premonition of death on June 29, when he heard the singing of the lament "Arunachal Shiva", a lament that had been sung at Ramaṇa's passing. He chanted it, too. Abhishiktānanda says that he lived that week in the *mythos* of being finally mastered by Arunāchala's pillar of fire. He met with Chidananda that evening. On leaving, he was seized with giddiness and had to lean on the handrail of the stairs.[176]

When he left Chaduc on July 14, Abhishiktānanda also left his coat with Chaduc. Chaduc later saw this like Elijah saying farewell to Elisha, and leaving him his cloak.[177] This was also Abhishiktānanda's understanding of his action.[178]

2. Rishikesh

a) Abhishiktānanda's Heart Attack: a Near Death Experience

On July 14, Abhishiktānanda left Chaduc at Ranagal and went to Rishikesh. At Rishikesh, Abhishiktānanda had a major heart attack. He was running to catch a bus. As he lay in the street, he was "providentially" recognized by a friend from Sivānanda Ashram, Yvonne Lemoine. Chidananda told her that it was not by chance that she found Abhishiktānanda and was able to help him.

Although helpless, Abhishiktānanda remained lucid in mind. After he recovered his speech, his first words were, "It is beautiful, I can't tell you how beautiful it is! Simply to open one's eyes on where one is."[179] He wrote his sister:

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[174] Cited by Ramananda Swarnagiri in Herbert, Jean: *Etudes sur Ramana Maharshi* (Dervy-Livres, 1972, first published 1940), p. 213.

[175] *Diary*, p. 387.

[176] *Diary* p. 387 (11.9.73).

[177] Odette Baumer-Despeigne: "The Spiritual Way of Henri Le Saux Swami Abhishiktānanda", *Bulletin of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue*, 1993, vol. 48, Oct., p. 24.

[178] *Letters,* p. 313 (MC,23.9.73).

> Everything was so wonderful during these first two weeks [after the heart attack]. Later came the stripping away of all thought, meditation, contemplation.[180]

A month after his heart attack, Abhishiktānanda writes,

> The heart-attack was only the backdrop to a marvellous spiritual experience. I then made the discovery that life and death are only particular situations, and the 'I', the 'Awakening', is not tied to them or limited by them. Of the two weeks spent in bed I recall nothing but intense joy. It was a tremendous surprise but also a unique experience, this Awakening to the Real in the unity of the Spirit.[181]

Abhishiktānanda writes of a sense of a struggle within himself between the angel of death and the angel of life. He felt that his urge to live was fighting against the death-urge. He understood the imagery of being saved from *Yama*, the god of Death, and from the jaws of Sheol as described in David's psalms.

And to another person he writes,

> It seemed to me as if I was navigating between the two 'shores' of being that man calls life and death, and to discover myself in the middle of the great current of Being Itself which has nothing to do either with life or with death[182]

He describes his experience in his *Diary:*

> And all of that made me discover myself at a level that went so far beyond all sensations. Seeing myself so weak, so incapable of thought and movement, I became free from my identification with that *myself* which previously used to think and will, used to move about and was anxious about all and sundry. Disconnection. All that consciousness with which I usually moved was no longer mine, and yet I myself still continued to be…
>
> Another intuition or rather another form of the single intuition, that deeply affected me in those days was: *a-loka.* My freedom, my disconnection from every *loka*-situation, even from the *loka*-situation of life/death. To Be, free from all situations, physical, psychological, spiritual, or religious. Free from every situation–any ascetic setting, any form of asceticism, any form whatever. To find oneself, recover oneself in one's original purity-nakedness.[183]

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[179] Odette Baumer-Despeigne: "The Spiritual Journey of Henri Le Saux-Abhishiktānanda" *Cistercian Studies* (1983) v. 4., p. 328.

[180] *Letters*, p. 318 (22.10.73).

[181] Cited by Odette Baumer-Despeigne, "The Spiritual Journey of Henri Le Saux-Abhishiktānanda", p. 328.

[182] Cited by Odette Baumer-Despeigne, "The Spiritual Journey of Henri Le Saux-Abhishiktānanda", p. 328 (Letter to Christian Belle).

[183] *Diary*, p. 387.

He writes to Odette Baumer-Despeigne regarding this feeling of *a-loka*:

> This heart attack has taught me that the *loka*–places, situations–are quite unimportant. Anyone who still sees a difference between the Hindu environment of Rishikesh and that of a nursing home at Indore has not (yet) understood the mystery of non-duality (*advaita*).[184]

Abhishiktānanda writes to Murray Rogers in September, describing his experience:

> Really a door opened in heaven when I was lying on the pavement, but a heaven which was not the opposite of earth, something which was neither life nor death, but simply 'being', 'awakening' beyond all myths and symbols. This Awakening was a total explosion.[185]

Abhishiktānanda's experience was clearly a near death experience.[186] In this connection, it should be remembered that Ramaṇa also had a near death experience where his companion thought that he was dead. Is a near-death experience the same as an *advaitic* experience? Ramaṇa thought that it was, and in fact traced his enlightenment to an enactment of death at the age of 16. But cannot a near death experience also be interpreted dualistically? If it is an experience of viewing oneself from a distance, as both Ramaṇa and Abhishiktānanda record, can this not be regarded as consciousness being distinct from the matter of the body that is being observed?

One comment made by Abhishiktānanda suggests a dualistic interpretation of the experience. Abhishiktānanda records his sense of the smallness of his body. He found it "hard to be convinced that this minimum of matter is enough to support consciousness."[187] This at first suggests a distinction between matter and spirit or consciousness. However, Abhishiktānanda also says that he no longer identified with consciousness either. "All that consciousness with which I usually moved was no longer mine, and yet I myself still continued to be…"[188] Thus it is not the case of dualistically favouring consciousness over matter.

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[184] Cited by Odette Baumer-Despeigne, "Swami Abhishiktānanda: More than a Meeting–A Darshan", *Shabda Shakti Sangam*, ed. Vandana Mataj (Rishikesh, 1995), p. 433.

[185] *Diary*, p. 311 (MR, 10.9.73).

[186] However, Abhishiktānanda cautions that the experience "was no grand vision, but a waiting, an awakening, quite peaceful, to something which is neither life nor death." *Letters*, p. 312 (AF, 17.9.73).

[187] *Diary*, p. 386.

[188] *Diary*, p. 387.

The majority of Abhishiktānanda's descriptions of his experience are non-dualistic. He describes being beyond all dualities, whether of life and death. He does not expressly describe being beyond time, but he does describe his being beyond space, *a-loka*. He says he was free from every situation. These descriptions of his experience have a sense of directness and vividness. It is a record of a lived experience, and not just a repeating of what he had read.

Can we regard the *advaitic* experience of Abhishiktānanda as nothing more than a physiological response to the heart attack? Abhishiktānanda's own understanding was the other way round. He said that the heart attack was caused by a spiritual experience of such intensity that the body could not resist it. He told Yvonne Lemoine, "I knew I was tired; I did not really run after that bus; I began and then I stopped." "Ce fut si beau". "A human heart cannot take so much joy, and mine could not have been big enough. It was joy–'un coup de Shiva'.[189]

Abhishiktānanda had previously written that the ultimate *advaitic* experience involves a kind of death.

> L'homme meurt de l'expérience de ananta (infini)
> au-delà de l'au-delà
> Brahman.
> Mort, mort, en devenant Brahman, le TOUT Brahman *sarvam.*
> *Oui cela est vrai,*
> *l'engouffrement dans cette Source!*
>
> A person dies of the experience of the infinite [*ananta*]
> beyond the beyond–
> Brahman
> Dead, dead, in becoming Brahman, the ALL, Brahman *sarvam*.
> Yes that is true,
> being absorbed in this Source![190]

He says in the same passage that the *rishis* have locked away the experience in *mantras* lest it should cause a person to die at the moment of this inner disjunction. What is this disjunction? It is the movement from the mortal flesh, beyond the boundary of the *śarīra*. If the body is shaken off there is liberation; if there is liberation without shaking off the body it is *jīvanmukti*.

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[189] Sister Vandana, R.S.C.J.: "A Messenger of Light", *Clergy Monthly*, December, 1974, p. 500.

[190] *La* montée, p. 426; Diary, p. 349 (11.5.72).

Elsewhere he says, "But the mystery of the eternal birth can only be passed on in the terrifying experience of death by the *ātman* itself."[191] The death of the body may or may not follow.[192] He compares the experience to the death of Jesus. The death of Jesus, the great death on the cross, was less the separation of "soul" from body than feeling himself "abandoned" by God, the depth of Him whom he called the Father with so much love.

b) The Experience of Awakening

On July 23, Abhishiktānanda writes to Odette Baumer-Despeigne that he had experienced the Awakening:

> It is wonderful to undergo such an experience which brings the fullness of peace and joy beyond all circumstances, even those of death or life. Life can never be the same since I have found the Awakening! Rejoice with me.[193]

This is very different from what he wrote only a few months previously, that there is no awakening, and that one should not seek realization. This letter to Odette Baumer-Despeigne was completed in a trembling hand, "*OM*, that says everything! *sarvam brahman*–all is God." These are the same words that Ramaṇa emphasized in his interpretation of the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*–all this is *Brahman*! It seems that Abhishiktānanda's experience was one that gave him this perspective of seeing *Brahman* in all things. This is confirmed in a letter that he had written to Chaduc two days before:

> I have to recognize that a 'Force' passes through being (beings?) which is terribly dangerous. For my affair was not so much the result of stupidly running after a bus, as the upshot of those two weeks, the *explosion* of which the poem spoke.[194]

The two weeks that he is referring to here are the preceding weeks of Chaduc's *dīkshā* and of their time at Ranagal. Abhishiktānanda's recognition of the "Force" passing through beings will be looked at in more detail in the next chapter.

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[191] *Diary*, p. 350 (20.5.72). This is a strange expression, since the *ātman* is normally seen as that which is eternal in the person.

[192] *Diary*, p. 355 (31.5.72).

[193] Odette Baumer-Despeigne: "The Spiritual Way of Henri Le Saux Swami Abhishiktānanda", *Bulletin of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue*, 1993, vol. 48, Oct., p. 24.

[194] *Letters*, p. 307 (MC, 21.7.73). The poem referred to is reproduced on page 304 of the *Letters.*

Later in September, Abhishiktānanda again tries to describe the experience. He speaks of his heart attack as a "marvellous spiritual adventure". The "center of his intuition" in the very first days after his heart attack was:

> The Awakening is independent of any situation whatever, of all the pairs of opposites [*dvandvas*], and first of all of the *dvandva* called life/death. One awakes everywhere and once for all, and the awakening cannot be confused with what one sees at the moment of the awakening, and therefore with that through which one becomes conscious that one is awake.[195]

After his heart attack, there is no doubt for Abhishiktānanda that there is an Awakening. And he says that this Awakening is beyond all pairs of opposites.

Although Abhishiktānanda says his near-death experience was a great adventure, he also tried to de-emphasize the grandeur of the experience. He objects to the way that others were telling the story of this near-death experience, and he cautions that it should not be seen in too mythical terms:

> I have heard through S.G. the manner in which things were described to A., M., etc. *Please* don't add anything to my myth. There was no grand vision, but a waiting, an awakening, quite peaceful, to something which is neither life nor death. Besides, that was helped by the fact that at that moment the 'mind' was working at an infinitely reduced speed.[196]

This is quite a remarkable statement. Throughout his time in India, Abhishiktānanda had sought the *advaitic* experience. Now when he believes that he finally has achieved it, he plays it down. It is true that elsewhere he describes the experience in a much more glorious way; as we shall see, he speaks of his experience as comparable to the finding of the Grail. But in this statement, he refers to the experience as a "waiting." This reminds me of Heidegger's idea of "listening to Being".

c) The I-Experience

His experience confirmed for him the centrality of the "I-experience". This experience is not something notional or conceptual, but is rather an existential awareness of being. In September, a few months after the heart attack, Abhishiktānanda wrote to Murray Rogers:

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[195] *Diary*, pp. 385-387 (11.9.73).

> Even more after my 'beyond life/death' experience of 14.7, I can only aim at awakening people to what 'they are'. Anything about God or the Word in any religion, which is not based on the deep I-experience, is bound to be simply 'notion', not existential.[197]

In his *Diary*, he says much the same thing again. Abhishiktānanda says that as a result of his near death experience,

> This is the culmination of the intuition that struck me in January: "Everything has become clear." There is only the Awakening. All that is "notional"–myths and concepts–is only its expression.[198]

d) Fire and Light

Chaduc waited for Abhishiktānanda at Ranagal. He had felt himself irresistibly prevented from leaving Ranagal, being *cloué par Shiva* [nailed to the spot by Shiva]. Four days after Abhishiktānanda's heart attack, Chaduc was brought the following poem in which Abhishiktānanda described his heart attack in terms of Shiva's fire:

MARC,
Shiva's column of fire
brushed against me
Saturday midday
In the bazaar at Rishikesh,
And I still do not understand
Why it did not carry me off.
Joy, the serene one,
OM tat sat
Ekatdrishti [the one pointed gaze]
Ekarshi [the unique rishi]
Oh!
The crowning grace
OM!
With my love.[199]

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[196] *Letters*, p. 312 (AF, 17.9.73).

[197] *Letters*, p. 310 (MR, 2.9.73).

[198] *Diary*, p. 386. The January date is after Abhishiktānanda said that he knew that the experience of the Upanishads is true.

[199] *Letters*, p. 306.

We see again his comparison of the experience to Shiva's fire and the fire of Arunāchala. Abhishiktānanda said that he lived the events of the great week (10-18 July) in the mythos of Arunāchala's pillar of fire.[200]

e) Did this experience change Abhishiktānanda's views?

Abhishiktānanda said that his first night after the heart attack was filled with difficult dreams, although they were not nightmares. In these dreams, he was led from cave to cave at different altitudes. And in his dream, he himself was constantly saying,

> The awakening has nothing to do with "testing oneself" against increasingly difficult life situations. It comes about in any circumstances. At every moment of life, in fact in every circumstance, *I wake up*.[201]

He had earlier written to Chaduc that the one-pointed gaze of awakening [*Ekadrishti*] has nothing to do with confronting exceptional situations of cold, solitude, or nakedness. It is simply opening your eyes there where you are![202] In other words, it is not a matter of asceticism but of seeing clearly. Awakening has nothing to do with measuring yourself against more and more difficult living conditions. This seems to be an experience of the truth that *samsāra* is *nirvana*–that you only need to open your eyes to where you are. But whereas he had known of this before in an intellectual way, he now experiences it himself after his Awakening. In one of his last letters, he writes,

> …'*Jerusalem beata*' [holy-heavenly Jerusalem] does not lie in our always mythical dreams of the future. It is *kai nun* [even now], we only have to open our eyes! That is the one thing that I should like to get people to realize from now on, if I go on living. And it is so simple that no one can grasp it…[203]

Does this mean that Abhishiktānanda's near-death experience had changed his views about the necessity of ascetic renunciation and acosmism? It is difficult to know, since he did not live very long and we do not know the direction that his life would have taken. The fact that he now sees enlightenment as different from ascetic tests would seem to indicate a difference. On the one

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[200] *Diary*, p. 387.

[201] *Diary*, p. 386.

[202] L*etters*, p. 307 (MC, 21.7.73).

[203] Cited in *Diary*, pp. 365, 366.

hand, he continues to affirm that Chaduc had understood him in a way that no one had ever understood him before. On November 23, Abhishiktānanda wrote to Chaduc again:

> You are the only person, as well I know, to whom I have been able to say and to pass on everything, in words and beyond words. […] You accepted the '*tabula rasa*' (the emptying of the mind) and from that *tabula rasa* the sparks flew. Yes, none of it was 'mine' or 'yours'. But that 'Greater One' whom you find lying beyond myself and yourself, is not-other-than you or me.[204]

Chaduc tried to lead a very acosmic life. Abhishiktānanda's praise of him may seem to suggest an endorsement of acosmism. Furthermore, in one of his last letters he writes that Hindu India must re-learn from Christian monks the secret and the value of the acosmic life.[205] On the other hand, he speaks of the fact that he survived his heart attack as a return for a purpose. The grace of returning to life was for the sake of others, to tell others of the discovery of the Grail. Returning to life was a grace, a "new lease" of life; returning to life was not for his sake but for others.[206] His life was to be lived in the service of his Awakening. His aim was to awaken people to what 'they are'. That suggests a very different direction than acosmism.

Abhishiktānanda writes that he was very tired. He writes that he must just simply be there, without even meditating:

> It is so delightful to write–in the abstract–about the nudity of the spirit. But then the Lord takes you seriously, removes every fine thought and leaves you lying there, capable of nothing more than simply being there.[207]

He writes about his condition as being "like a beast before thee."[208] James Stuart says this is a Benedictine symbol of humility.

Chaduc wrote to him saying to come to the mountains, and he would help Abhishiktānanda to die if need be.[209] Does that show Chaduc's acosmism and indifference to the

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[204] *Letters*, p. 319 (MC, 23.11.73).

[205] *Lettres d'un sannyāsī chrétien à Joseph Lemarié*, p. 420 (22.9.73).

[206] *Letters*, p. 308 (MT, 9.8.73).

[207] *Letters*, p. 321 (FT, 30.11.73).

[208] *Letters*, p. 314 (MC, 4.10.73). Abhishiktānanda uses the Latin phrase "*ut jumentum"*.

[209] See *Letters*, p. 316.

world? It must be remembered that Chaduc is believed to have taken his own life by throwing himself in the Ganges. In any event, Abhishiktānanda does not accept his offer.

Abhishiktānanda says that the *advaitic* experience should not be permitted except for those who were very strong; only some are capable of it. The Vedantic secret should not be revealed except to the competent, the initiated. The experience of Vedānta drains people and is just as dangerous as drugs or psychoanalysis. "It is probably better for most people to pass the *shakti* by, than to be a carrier of it, without realising it. But some are capable of it."[210]

In October, Odette Baumer-Despeigne visited Abhishiktānanda in the nursing home at Indore where he was staying (a home run by the Franciscan Sisters). She records her experience of seeing him as a kind of *darshan*:

> His entire being was total transparence to the inner Mystery, joy and peace radiating in his penetrating regard which reduced one to silence, to an amazing silence.[211]

She speaks of the radiance of his face, the eyes of a child in the face of an old man, a being who belonged to a different category of mortals.[212] Abhishiktānanda kept repeating, "But in the end it is so simple; as it says in the Upanishad–"the eye just blinks…Ah!"" {Ken, 4,4).[213]

She asked him to speak about Shiva, but he was silent. She understood this silence as a reproach–that she had understood nothing of what he said. When they celebrated the Eucharist, Abhishiktānanda said, "This is my body" with such an *advaitic* intonation that she was petrified.

On his deathbed, Abhishiktānanda was clothed in the orange robe of a *sannyāsī*. Abhishiktānanda said to Odette:

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[210] *Letters*, p. 318 (MC, 26.10.73).

[211] Odette Baumer-Despeigne: "The Spiritual Way of Henri Le Saux Swami Abhishiktānanda", *Bulletin of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue*, 1993, vol. 48, Oct., p. 24. She says that all who saw him agree in their testimony to the transparence of his whole being to the divine Presence, an extraordinary radiance of his smile, and the expression of his eyes, wide open in wonder. Panikkar writes: "Everyone who visited you in the last months of your life witnesses to the fact that you were another man: transfigured." "A Letter to Abhishiktānanda", p. 449.

[212] Odette Baumer-Despeigne, "Swami Abhishiktānanda: More than a Meeting–A Darshan", *Shabda Shakti Sangam*, ed. Vandana Mataj (Rishikesh, 19095), p. 433.

[213] *Ibid.* p. 435.

> What a story, finally, when one has done all that one can, this will be as God willed, I am ready. Now this will be always more or less like that! Behold, as God wills! What trouble I have given you!

f) The Grail

Abhishiktānanda compared his *advaitic* experience to the experience of finding the Holy Grail:

> After some days [after the heart attack] there came to me, as if it were the marvellous solution to an equation: I have found the Grail. And that is what I keep saying and writing to anyone who can grasp the figure of speech. The quest for the Grail is basically nothing else than the quest for the Self. A single quest, that is the meaning of all the myths and symbols. It is yourself that you are seeking through everything. And in this quest you run about everywhere, whereas the Grail is here, close at hand, you only have to open your eyes. And that is the finding of the Grail in its ultimate truth, Galahad's direct sight of the inside of the vessel, and no longer just being fed by the Grail which mysteriously passes through the hall, nor even drinking from the Grail.[214]

The Grail is of course a Christian symbol. Abhishiktānanda uses it here to refer to his *advaitic* experience. How does Abhishiktānanda use this symbol of the Grail? First, he emphasizes the quest part of the myth. Awakening is a quest, a search. This confirms Abhishiktānanda's understanding after his hear attack that the "awakening: is something to be sought. The idea of a quest seems to negate the idea he had earlier expressed that awakening should not be sought.

Second, Abhishiktānanda explicitly says that the quest for the Grail is a "quest for the Self"

> This grace of awakening–of returning to life–is not for my sake but for others. It was so clear: to announce the discovery of the Grail, to tell people: *Uttishta, purusha*, Arise, Purusha! (KathU 3, 14), discover the Grail. Look, it is in the depth of yourself, it is that very "I" that you are saying in every moment of your conscious life, even in the depth of your consciousness when you dream or sleep.[215]

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[214] *Diary*, p. 386, (Sept./73).

[215] *Diary*, p. 386 (11.9.73). The Purusha is the symbol of the mystery of every human being: "Jesus is the marvellous epiphany of the mystery of Man, of the Purusha, the mystery of every human being, as were the Buddha and Ramana and so many others. He is the mystery of the Purusha who is seeking himself in the cosmos." *Diary*, p. 367 (2.1.73).

Third, in referring to the Grail, Abhishiktānanda is obviously not referring to any physical object that he obtained. It is rather a state of consciousness, which he equates with the *advaitic* experience.

Fourth, Abhishiktānanda emphasizes the looking within the cup. According to Christian de Troyes' *Quest of the Grail*, looking within the cup is the climax of Galahad's quest. What does Abhishiktānanda understand by this looking within? He links it to the going beyond of all notions, the "explosion" of our concepts:

> Again, if my message could really pass, it would be free from any 'notion' except just by the way of 'excipient'. The Christ I might present will be simply the I AM of my (every) deep heart, who can show himself in the dancing Shiva or the amorous Krishna. And the kingdom is precisely this discovery…of the 'inside' of the Grail! (…) The awakening is a total explosion. No Church will recognize its Christ or itself afterwards. And precisely for that (reason), no one likes the 'atomic mushroom'![216]

Fifth, Abhishiktānanda says that the Grail is not far, the quest is for something near at hand. You just open your eyes.

Finally, Abhishiktānanda relates the Grail to the experience of being, independently of any specific location or any specific state. He writes to his sister:

> It was a marvellous spiritual experience. The discovery that the AWAKENING has nothing to do with any situation, even so-called life or so-called death; one is awake and that is all. While I was waiting on my sidewalk, on the frontier of the two worlds, I was magnificently calm, for I AM, no matter in what world! I have found the GRAIL! And this extra lease of life—for such it is—can only be used for living and sharing this discovery.[217]

Some of this symbolism is repeated in his letter to Odette Baumer-Despeigne:

> The Grail is a marvellous symbol, that old myth around which have coalesced a heap of pagan Celtic and later, Christian myths. With many others Galahad caught the fragrance of the Grail, with Bors and Perceval he drank of it, and one day it was given to him alone openly to see within it. The Grail is a symbol which has greatly impressed me; and on the second and third day of my 'adventure' it suddenly came to me—In this adventure I have found the Grail. And what is left for me to do in this life, apart from inviting others to make this

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[216] *Letters*, p. 311 (MR, 4.10.73).

[217] *Letters*, p. 308 (MT, 9.8.73).

> discovery? The Grail is neither far nor near, it is free from all location. The take-off, the awakening—and the quest is over. Through all the intervening myths it is the Awakening alone that is the goal of the quest.[218]

Where did Abhishiktānanda obtain this imagery and symbolism of the Grail? Abhishiktānanda refers to the fact that it is an old Celtic myth. He may have been familiar with it from having grown up in Brittany. But if so, it is remarkable that he does not mention it in previous writings. Something must have occurred to make him more conscious of the Grail symbolism. It appears that Abhishiktānanda's interest in the Grail may derive from a seminar he attended in March, 1973. The seminar was at the Rajpur Centre, where Simone Weil's ideas on the Grail had been discussed. Mrs. Anne-Marie Stokes had also attended the seminar. She writes:

> Simone Weil and her ardent wish to be a bridge between religions and cultures was often quoted, and also her magnificent thoughts on the Holy Grail.[219]

Simone Weil is known for her writings about the impact of suffering, and the importance of love of neighbour. She makes a connection with the Grail. She says that the Grail satisfies all hunger. And the first legend of the Grail says that the Grail belongs to the one who first asks the guardian of the vessel, "What are you going through?" This question implies complete love for neighbour, a recognition not that the sufferer exists, not only as a unit in a collection, or as an "unfortunate", but as a person exactly like us who was one day stamped with a special mark by affliction. We must know how to look at this afflicted person. Significantly, Weil writes about this way of looking:

> This way of looking is first of all attentive. The soul empties itself of all its own contents in order to receive into itself the being it is looking at, just as he is, in all his truth. Only he who is capable of attention can do this.[220]

We do not know whether this particular article of Weil's was discussed at the Rajpur seminar that Abhishiktānanda attended. But there is a link between this "emptying" of the soul of all its

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[218] *Letters*, p. 311 (OB, 4.9.73).

[219] Anne-Marie Stokes: "Recollections of Abhishiktānanda", cited in *Letters*, pp. 287-288.

[220] Simone Weil: "Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies", *Simone Weil Reader*, ed. George A. Panichas (New York: Moyer Bell, 1977), p. 51. Susan Visvanathan refers to Weil's question, "What are you going through?" in her *An Ethnography of Mysticism*, pp. 47, 48, but she does not emphasize this emptying of the soul. It is in sharing of affliction that attention, waiting on God, realises itself.

contents, and what Abhishiktānanda associated with the looking into the cup of the Grail–the going beyond all notions.

This was not Abhishiktānanda's first acquaintance with Weil. As early as 1950, Monchanin wrote Abhishiktānanda about certain books by Simone Weil that he had received: *L'Enracinement* and *L'Attente de Dieu.*[221] But Abhishiktānanda does not write about Weil or her ideas of suffering. In fact, at the Rajpur seminar, Abhishiktānanda said, "I do not know either evil or suffering."[222]

Further amplification of the Grail imagery may be found in an article by Richard Smoley, introducing a special issue of the magazine *Gnosis* dealing with the Grail.[223] For Smoley, the true mystery inherent in the Grail myth is that the Grail is the "heart", a heart that has been illumined and awakened so that it may serve as a receptacle for divine energies. Smoley refers to several writers who have compared the Grail to such a structure of consciousness. A Russian Orthodox mystic named Alexander Mumrikov has observed that if one carries out the Jesus Prayer properly,

> …one senses a kind of chalice opening upward. . . . The chalice represents the spiritual development of man. The first sphere is formed at the level of the chest. . . . The second sphere is compressed at the level of the throat. And the third sphere opens in the head.

Mumrikov goes on to say that the chalices depicted in the icons of the Orthodox Church "represent the science of those people who have learned how to direct their energy. They are able to feel the chalice in themselves and to watch the transformation of the energy as it takes place."[224]

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[221] *Abbé Monchanin: Lettres au Père Le Saux*, ed. Françoise Jacquin (Paris: Cerf, 1995), p. 79 (Letter to Abhishiktānanda 6.6.50). Monchanin wrote briefly about Weil. See *In Quest of the Absolute: The Life and Work of Jules Monchanin*, ed. J.G. Weber, p. 118.

[222] Anne-Marie Stokes: "Recollections of Abhishiktānanda", cited in *Letters*, pp. 287-288. Mrs. Stokes was originally from Brittany. Abhishiktānanda had corresponded with her. He travelled to Haridwār, Rishikesh, Dehra Dun, and Rajpur with her.

[223] Richard Smoley: "The Illuminated Heart", "The Grail", *Gnosis* Spring, 1999, vol. 51. See http://www.gnosismagazine.com/intros/intro51.html.

[224] Interview with Dennis Lewis, "The Place of Energy in the Prayer of Jesus," in *Inner Alchemy* (San Francisco), vol. 1, no. 2 (Fall 1997), p. 3, cited by Smoley, *op. cit.* A fascinating parallel occurs in the writings of Monchanin, who compared the mysticism of Greek *hesychasm* to the *cakras* in *kundalini* yoga. See "Yoga et hésychasme", *Jules Monchanin: Mystique de l'Inde, mystère chretien*, ed. Suzanne Siauve (Paris: Fayard, 1974), p. 109. In "L'actualité

This viewpoint would have many similarities with Abhishiktānanda's emphasis on the heart as the place of transformation, and on the Grail as a new state of consciousness that is attained in the *advaitic* experience. The references to the various openings seem to correspond with the *cakras*, both the heart *cakra* and the *sahasrāra.*

Another amplification suggests itself in connection with the nondual view of the Self. Abhishiktānanda emphasizes that Galahad saw within the Grail, and that the Grail is neither far nor near, it is free from all location.[225] We may speculate that in looking inside, Galahad realized that the inside is the outside, but formed by the Grail. Shankara, following Gaudapāda, gives a similar analogy of the relation between *Atman* and *Brahman*. Just as space, which is single and continuous, may be enclosed in a pot, so the Self is manifested in various individual selves.[226]

As will be shown in the Appendix, Jung uses the symbol of the Grail to refer to the Self and the process of individuation. Ken Wilber uses the same symbolism of the Grail to refer to the ultimate state of nondual experience:

> For those who wish to follow the mystics to this Level, it is the venture of all ventures, the quest for the Holy Grail, the search for the Philosopher's Stone, the Elixir of Immortality, the Master Game itself.[227]

g) Prophetic Imagery

As already mentioned, in the course of his experiences with Chaduc, Abhishiktānanda begins to make increased references to Elijah. Elijah is considered the founder of the Carmelite order, and Abhishiktānanda's references to Elijah probably reflect the strong tradition of silent monasticism and apophaticism that the Carmelite order embodies.

To some extent, Abhishiktānanda had always been interested in the Carmelite order. It will be recalled that the primary article that prompted him to visit Ramaṇa was one in the journal

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du Carmel" (unpublished, probably written 1964. Archives, TS, 1-2.), Abhishiktānanda indicates a preference for Russian over European monasticism. "In India, monachisme will be closer to Russian than to Cluny or Cistercians."

[225] *Letters*, p. 311 (OB, 4.9.73).

[226] *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies: Advaita Vedanta up to Íaµkara and his Pupils,* ed. Karl H. Potter (Princeton, 1981).

[227] Ken Wilber: *The Spectrum of Consciousness* (Wheaton: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1977), p. 296.

Études Carmélitaines. An article in an earlier issue of that journal concerns whether Elijah can be considered the founder of the Carmelite order.[228] The conclusion is that yes, he can be considered the founder, and the same Spirit anointed Elijah, Elisha and John the Baptist.

Abhishiktānanda was also influenced by Monchanin's writings about the Carmelites. Monchanin wrote about St. John of the Cross, who was, together with St. Teresa, one of the later founders of the Carmelite order. In 1938, Monchanin wrote that St. John of the Cross and Meister Eckhart had the form of holiness that India asked for–rejection of the sensible, a rejection even of the noetic, a going beyond psychology, an absolute *kenosis* for the absolute of being, which is itself perceived as beyond and before all being, as presence.[229] Monchanin visited the Carmelites in Bangalore in 1950. He was very happy with his experience there. In a letter to Abhishiktānanda, Monchanin calls the Carmelites "an image in miniature of the Church that contemplates."[230] In 1954, Monchanin was approached as to the possible contribution of an article to a special issue of *Études Carmélitaines* on Elijah. Monchanin did not contribute an article, but he appreciated greatly those that were published, especially an article by Massignon, "Elie et son rôle transhistorique, khadiriya en islam".[231] In 1956, at a conference organized by Mahadevan, Monchanin spoke on St. John of the Cross. Monchanin thought that his mysticism would be of particular interest to Hindus and Moslems.

Abhishiktānanda also wrote about the Carmelite order. In 1964 he wrote "India and the Carmelite Order".[232] He points out the link between the Order and the prophet Elijah,

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[228] P. Marie-Joseph du Sacré-Coeur: "Le saint prophète Elie est le fondateur de l'ordre du Carmel" *Études Carmélitaines*, 1924 Jul-Dec/24, vol. 9 (211-230).

[229] *Jules Monchanin: Mystique de l'Inde, Mystère Chretien*, ed. Suzanne Siauve (Paris: Fayard, 1974) p. 143 (24.11.38). The word *kenosis* is from Paul's language in Phil. 2:7. Monchanin here uses the phrase "*kenosis* pour l'absolu du Sat." It is unclear whether the empyting is that of humans in their attainment of Being, or the emptying of of Being. Abhishiktānanda emphatically takes the latter interpretation of *kenosis*, as we shall see in the discussion of his view of emanation from the One. Elsewhere, Monchanin does say "The Universe is the multiple kenosis of God…" (See *In Quest of the Absolute: The Life and Work of Jules Monchanin*, ed. J.G. Weber, p. 150).

[230] Letter June 6, 1950. *Abbé Monchanin: Lettres au Père Le Saux*, ed. Françoise Jacquin (Paris: Cerf, 1995), p. 79.

[231] Letter February 17, 1954. *Abbé Monchanin: Lettres au Père Le Saux*, ed. Françoise Jacquin (Paris: Cerf, 1995), p. 127.

[232] "India and the Carmelite Order" (1964), *Eyes of Light*, pp. 64-100. See also the unpublished article "L'actualité du Carmel", probably written in 1964. Archives, TS, 1-2. In the latter article, he says that the Carmelite order had an "oriental origin", but that it changed when it came to the West. The essentials of the early Carmelite order were solitude and contemplation. More than any other order it witnesses to the Absolute which God placed at the depth

> The one to whom God revealed Himself no longer in the flame of fire, as to Moses, but in the sound of a gentle breeze at the entrance to his cave, his *guha* (1 Kings, 19:12-13).[233]

The vocation of the Carmelite, in the silence of prayer, is to adore the incommunicability of God in the depths:

> The marvel lies precisely in the fact that it is not what can be chanted about God that is the loftiest, the truest, but rather, that which goes beyond all manifestation, all understanding (cf. Eph. 3:19), this beyondness beyond all that can be uttered and adored. It is only there, in truth, that God is![234]

The silence and solitude of the Carmelites is precisely their service.

> Any soul that penetrates within, just by doing so, deepens the Church and the Church's consciousness of herself. (…) That is precisely the irreplaceable role, the very *service* of the contemplatives in the Church. (…) They do not have to try to apologize for their so-called uselessness, inefficacy. Their uselessness, their silence, their solicitude, their refusal, finally, to accomplish anything whatsoever in the outer world is precisely the nature of the *service* in the Church.[235]

Like Monchanin, Abhishiktānanda saw an "admirable kinship" between this vocation of the Carmelite and the fundamental vocation of India. Carmelites have the duty to immerse themselves in the deepest mystery of India. In doing this, they must go beyond even the Carmelite Order itself. He compares the prophets of Yahweh to the *rishis* of India. The prophets were the heralds of the Word; the *rishis* were the privileged witnesses of the Silence of God:

> Had they met, probably neither Elijah the Prophet nor Yasnavalkya [*sic*], the *Rishi*, would have recognized or understood each other for, humanly speaking, they were approaching each other from totally opposite slopes of the holy Mountain. Nevertheless both of them were precursors of Christ.[236]

Abhishiktānanda's appreciation for Carmelites and other Western mystics is shown in a letter from 1959. He speaks of the early Franciscans as "wandering Christian *sannyāsīs*". His highest praise is reserved for the Carmelites:

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of the heart of man creating him in his own image. The order leads one beyond all signs: "Dieu le *Todo* dans le *Nada*". He says that the rule of the Carmelite order is the minimum organization within an ecclesiastical institution.

[233] *Ibid*., p. 77.

[234] *Ibid*. p. 78.

[235] *Ibid*., p. 73.

[236] *Ibid*., p. 96.

> However, the Carmel–or at least as it is idealized in my vision of it–is perhaps what comes closest in the Church to India's deepest aspirations: the acosmics of the Desert Fathers; the "Flee, be silent, remain at rest" of Arsenius; the '*nada*' [nothing] of St. John of the Cross; above all, the going beyond, the "establishment of oneself beyond oneself" of Tauler and Eckhart.[237]

Abhishiktānanda compares his experience of meditating in the caves with Elijah:

> Like Moses and Elijah he [the Christian] wants to hide in some cleft of the rock from which he may contemplate God. However, even the remotest and most inaccessible 'caverns' of his heart turn out to be occupied already, and the darkness in which he had hoped to save his personal existence from annihilation in Being is already ablaze with the glory of God.[238]

This Carmelite influence remained strong in Abhishiktānanda throughout his life. The close connection that Abhishiktānanda had with Sister Térèse must have reinforced his interest in Carmelite ways of viewing mysticism and meditation. Sr. Thérèse of Shembaganur wanted to found a Carmel on the lines of Abhishiktānanda's ideal.[239]

Abhishiktānanda's increased references to Elijah may also be due to his meeting with Chidananda, who performed the joint *dīkshā* for Chaduc. Chidananda was interviewed after Abhishiktānanda's death, and he described Abhishiktānanda and Chaduc using Christian descriptions of their mystical experience:

> They had both gone into the realms of the Unknown, the Undefinable, the Transcendental; not drawn into "name and form" as though they had, in their aspirations, pierced "the cloud of unknowing" and had come out into pure white light.[240]

It must be remembered that Chidananda had a Christian education. He may have reinforced some of Abhishiktānanda's ideas about prophets. Chidananda specifically said that Abhishiktānanda reminded him of some of the Biblical prophets of the Old Testament, and at other times of the Desert Fathers. His appearance reminded Chidananda of the Old Testament prophets; his spirituality, asceticism, thirst for God reminded him of the latter.[241]

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237 *Letters*, p. 123 (FT, 26.10.59).

238 *Saccidānanda*, p. 64.

239 *Letters*, p. 144 (L.13.4.62)

240 Vandana: "A Messenger of Light", *Clergy Monthly*, December, 1974, p. 497.

241 *Ibid*., p. 498.

When she visited him in October 1973, Odette Baumer-Despeigne gave Abhishiktānanda a famous icon showing the departure of Elijah in his fiery chariot.[242] Elijah is borne aloft in his fiery Chariot (Chaduc said this was the fire of Arunāchala), and Elijah gives his mantle to Elisha, just as Abhishiktānanda had given his shawl to Chaduc. Abhishiktānanda looked at the picture of Elijah and commented on the mystery he had lived with Chaduc at Ranagal, the mystery of the disappearance of the *guru* in the very act of the total handing over.[243] Abhishiktānanda writes that only when Elijah was taken away in the chariot of fire was the Spirit given (to Elisha).[244] He contemplated the icon with longing.[245]

Panikkar also says that Abhishiktānanda felt himself to be a prophet. His vocation was dreaming the transfiguration of the Church, the purification of Hinduism and the elimination of his own ego.[246]

Chaduc also compares Elijah with the Hindu *sannyāsī*. He says that the Vedic image of the *keśī*, the 'hairy one', the perfect acosmic, recalls the prophetic figure of Elijah, the spiritual father of Carmel, the typical *sannyāsī* of the Old Testament, whose acosmic life is also entirely rooted in the vision of God.[247]

Abhishiktānanda wrote to Mother Françoise Therese, prioress of the Carmel of Lisieux, describing his experience with Chaduc. In this letter he again makes specific reference to Elijah:

> The emotions of the *sannyasa* of Chaduc, more than a week absolutely beyond conception in the jungle near to the Ganges from July 10-14, were too strong. The prophet Elias was very present to us during this extraordinary spiritual week.

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[242] Odette Baumer-Despeigne: "The Spiritual Way of Henri Le Saux Swami Abhishiktānanda", *Bulletin of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue*, 1993, vol. 48, Oct., p. 24.

[243] Cited by Odette Baumer-Despeigne, "Swami Abhishiktānanda: More than a Meeting–A Darshan", *Shabda Shakti Sangam*, ed. Vandana Mataj (Rishikesh, 1995), p. 434.

[244] "Sannyasa" *Further Shore*, p. 32. Similarly, the form of Jesus has to disappear in order to appear to disciples at Emmaus.

[245] *Letters*, p. 321 (AMS Dec. 3,73).

[246] Raimon Panikkar Intro to *Diary*, p. xix. At p. xxii Panikkar points out that in the last years of his life, Abhishiktānanda stayed with Carmelites in the Ranchi district, most of whom were *ādivāsī*, aboriginal Indians, *tribals*

[247] Marc Chaduc: Foreword to *Further Shore*, p. xi.

> It is necessary to believe what your saints of Carmel say, that there are interior experiences which the body–the heart–cannot endure.[248]

F. Interpretive Expressions

We have looked at Abhishiktānanda's descriptions of his experience. Some have the ring of authenticity, being vivid and spontaneous. I have tried to amplify these expressions, to look at them from several sides, in order to get a more complete understanding of their meaning. Of course these descriptions also rely on words and distinctions, all of which Abhishiktānanda says disappear in the final experience. For example, some of his descriptions use concepts that he obtained from other sources, such as the *sahasrāra cakra* from *kundalini,* in order to describe the experience. But some of Abhishiktānanda's descriptions point beyond themselves. Their conceptuality is in a sense self-negating. For example, "explosion" points to the inadequacy of any kind of concept to capture the experience. Abhishiktānanda's emphasis is on the utterly ineffable nature of the experience, and the fact that it can only be experienced existentially.

Although all of Abhishiktānanda's descriptions of his experience are inescapably tied to language and culture, some descriptions of the experience are more heavily theory and concept-laden (ramified). These descriptions are less vivid and immediate, and more consciously theoretical. They are an attempt by Abhishiktānanda to integrate his experiences into his changing conceptual framework, whether that framework is theological, psychological, philosophical or ethical. We have looked at some of these, such as Abhishiktānanda's Trinitarian explanation of the non-duality in the *guru*-disciple relationship. Another example of a highly ramified description is his insistence that the "I-experience" is the same experience as that of Jesus in acknowledging God as Father.

The remaining chapters of this thesis will examine these more conceptual or theoretical descriptions. Within these theoretical descriptions, some dualities may remain, and it is my intention to try to tease out these dualities and to explore other possible solutions that may exist for the problems that Abhishiktānanda raises. We will look at these theoretical descriptions under the headings of Perception, Thinking, Action, Phenomena, and God.

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[248] Odette Baumer-Despeigne: "The Spiritual Way of Henri Le Saux Swami Abhishiktānanda", *Bulletin of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue*, 1993, vol. 48, Oct., p. 24.

This examination of theoretical descriptions is an application of James's criterion of "philosophical reasonableness." In applying this criterion of philosophical reasonableness, we must bear in mind that what may appear "philosophically reasonable" to the person who has had the experience may not appear reasonable to someone who has not had the experience. For example, one might be tempted to apply the correspondence theory of truth in order to judge claims of an *advaitic* experience. But, as Barnard points out, such a theory of truth does not apply to *advaita*:

> Philosophers of religion who assume an epistemological realism typically claim that mystico-religious experiences are cognitive if and only if the mystic (understood as a self-existent, autonomous subject) has correct knowledge of God (understood, likewise, as an ontologically independent reality that is separate from the subject). However, what if the mystic has an experience in which the subject/object distinction itself disappears?[249]

In an *advaitic* experience, this subject/object distinction does disappear. From a dualistic point of view, such an *advaitic* experience appears "subjective" and noncognitive, with no "objective" referent for the experience. But from the *advaitic* point of view, the experience is cognitive but beyond subjectivity or objectivity.

One thing we can do to assess "philosophical reasonableness" is to look at the internal consistency or inconsistency of Abhishiktānanda's own understanding of the *advaitic* experience. This will be addressed in Chapters V through IX of this thesis by examining what dualities Abhishiktānanda denies, and whether any dualities, or traces of duality, still remain. Even in applying a criterion of consistency, we must ask whether the consistency is purely logical, or whether it allows for holding ideas in a paradoxical tension. Abhishiktānanda rejected a purely logical consistency. That is one reason he did not accept a monistic view of reality. So in checking the philosophical reasonableness of his ideas, we must look not only for the dualities that he denies, but also for the ways that Abhishiktānanda seeks to avoid monism.

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[249]Barnard, *Exploring Unseen Worlds: William James and the Philosophy of Mysticism* (State University of New York, 1997), p. 348.

V. Nondual Perception

A. Nondifference of Subject and Object

1. Some issues in nondual perception

Abhishiktānanda uses a perceptual image to describe his experience of awakening: "You only have to open your eyes."[1] He says that the awakening is beyond all the pairs of opposites or *dvandva*. Prior to his awakening, he had written that the *advaitic* experience (*anubhava*) is situated in a sphere where the duality of object and subject is transcended.[2]

But what does it mean for the duality of subject and object to be transcended? Does this mean that there is no longer a distinction between an experiencing self and what is experienced? Is there no distinction between things and ourselves? If there is no distinction between a perceiving subject and a perceived object, can we still speak of there being "perception" in the nondual experience? Can we still speak of "things" or objects? Can we still speak of a "self" who is observing them? Or does the transcending of subject and object mean that although there is still a distinction between them, a new unity–a "nondifference"–has been found between self and object, between self and "other"?

Using comparative philosophy, we may compare Abhishiktānanda's discussion of his *advaitic* experience to what others have said about nondual experience, both within Hinduism and in other traditions. One example of such a comparative approach is David Loy's *Nonduality: A Study in Comparative Philosophy*.[3] Loy contends that there is a nondual experience that is common among several different religious traditions. The main traditions that he examines are Advaita Vedānta, Buddhism and Taoism. Loy says that the philosophical differences among these traditions reflect different ways of expressing this one nondual

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[1] *Diary*, pp. 385-387 (11.9.73).

[2] "Notes de théologie trinitaire," *Intériorité*, p. 237 (January, 1973).

[3] David Loy: *Nonduality: A Study in Comparative Philosophy* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1988). This book will be referred to in this thesis as *Nonduality.*

experience. The experience is phenomenologically the same, but the experience is expressed using different ontologies.[4]

Because of his emphasis on the phenomenology of the nondual experience, Loy begins his study with an examination of ways that we *experience* nonduality–in our perception, in our thinking, and in our actions. The main sense of nonduality that Loy explores in these three kinds of experience is the "nondifference" between subject and object. Loy understands the "nondifference" between subject and object as the negation of the distinction between an experiencing self and what is experienced. In the nondual experience there is no distinction between one's self and one's experience, whether what is being experienced is a sense object (in perception), a physical action (in our actions), or a mental event (in our thought). Loy says that although the nondual experience is itself beyond subject and object, the philosophic expression of the experience tends to emphasize either the subject or the object. The Buddhist expression of the experience tends to deny the subject, as it does in the doctrine of *anātman*, or no-self. Vedānta Advaita tends to deny the object, as it does in its doctrine of *Brahman* who is only subject, One without a second.[5]

This chapter of the thesis deals with the first of these ways that the nondifference between subject and object is experienced–in our perception.

2. Nondual perception in Buddhism

a) Development of the idea of nondual perception in Buddhism

In order to use comparative philosophy in examining Abhishiktānanda's discussion of his *advaitic* experience, we need to briefly examine the issue of nondual perception in Buddhism.

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[4] As I have discussed in Chapter II of this thesis, such a distinction between phenomenological and ontological (or metaphysical) methods is open to challenge. There are metaphysical and ontological assumptions even in Loy's descriptions, particularly his Buddhist emphasis that *saṁsāra* is *nirvāṇa*, a denial that there are different levels of Reality. It is interesting that in *Guhāntara,* Abhishiktānanda speaks of the *kevala* experience and of *śūnyatā* as the same ("Dans le Centre le Plus Profond", unpublished).

[5] According to Loy, it makes no phenomenological difference whether we call the nondual state a state of "no consciousness" where there is no self, or of "all consciousness" where everything is a manifestation of Self. *Nonduality*, p. 210.

This is especially important in view of the fact that Abhishiktānanda sometimes uses Buddhist terminology in describing his experience.

Early Buddhism has a pluralistic view of the universe. It understands reality to consist of a multitude of discrete particulars or *dharmas*. Everything, including the self, is constantly changing and impermanent. All phenomena are related in a causal continuum by the doctrine of interdependent origination (*pratītya-samutpāda*). The 'self' is only the coming together of *skandhas* that disperse at death. According to Loy, early Buddhism does not appear to have had a doctrine of nondual perception. There is no statement in the Pāli Canon that clearly asserts nonduality of subject and object:

> One may view the *anātman* (no-self) doctrine of early Buddhism as another way of making the same point; instead of asserting that subject and object are one, the Buddha simply denies that there is a subject. These two formulations may well amount to the same thing, although the latter may be criticized as ontologically lopsided: since subject and object are interdependent, the subject cannot be eliminated without transforming the nature of the object (and vice-versa, as Advaita Vedānta was aware).[6]

Loy's criticism of early Buddhism is that it did not see the implications of its denial of a self. If there is no subject, then the assertion that there are objects is itself questionable. This type of questioning occurs in later Buddhism.

Mādhyamika Buddhism also makes no assertion about nondual perception. It makes few (if any) positive claims. It rather refutes all philosophical positions. It adopts the theory of *advayavāda* (neither of two alternative views) rather than *advaitavāda* (the theory of nondifference between subject and object).[7] Mādhyamika Buddhism criticizes the self-existence (*svabhāva*) of both subject and object. They are relative to each other and must both be unreal.[8]

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[6] *Nonduality*, p. 28.

[7] This explains why Loy moves so easily from the "nondiffference" of subject and object to their nonexistence. This theory of *advayavāda* is central to Loy's discussion of nonduality. He calls it the first sense of nonduality: the negation of dualistic thinking which makes distinctions. As will be discussed, Abhishiktānanda does not accept this sense of nonduality.

[8] *Nonduality*, p. 29. This use of the word "unreal" in describing this lack of self-existence is confusing. Although there is no self-existence of things and "self", this may be because they are radically inter-related, and not because they do not exist. Such inter-relation does not have to mean non-reality.

Nāgārjuna interprets the interdependent arising of things (*pratītya-samutpāda*) in terms of the absence of any being in them (*śūnyatā*). Neither subject nor object has any self-existence.

Paradoxically, having relied on causation to show this emptiness of being in things, Nāgārjuna also redefines interdependent origination in a way to deny causality:

> Looking at the commonsense distinction between things and their cause-and-effect relationships, Nāgārjuna first uses the latter to "deconstruct" the former and deny that there are any self-existing things. Less obvious is the second stage, which reverses the analysis. The lack of "thingness" in things implies a way of experiencing in which there is no awareness of cause of effect because one *is* the cause/effect.[9]

Loy's point here seems to be that "thingness" and "causality" are correlative terms, and that if one is denied, both must be denied (or at least, they must be understood in a new way). To explain this, Loy refers to an analogy from the later Chinese Hua-Yen Buddhism. This is the analogy of Indra's Net, where each particular event is not isolated but contains and manifests the whole.[10]

> …if every event that happens is interdependent with everything else in the whole universe (…) it implies the irrelevance of causality as usually understood. We find ourselves in a universe of *śūnya*-events, none of which can be said to occur for the sake of any other. Each nondual event–every leaf-flutter, wandering thought, and piece of litter–is whole and complete in itself, because although conditioned by everything else in the universe and thus a manifestation of it, for precisely that reason it is not subordinated to anything else but becomes an unconditioned end-in-itself.[11]

Mādhyamika Buddhism refutes the separate existence of subject and object by means of logical analysis. Yogācāra Buddhism is more psychological; it effects a withdrawal from subject and object by means of psychological trance.[12] Even the name 'Yogācāra' refers to "those who practise meditation." According to Yogācāra Buddhism, phenomena are manifestations that arise from Mind-only, the highest reality.[13] There is a nonduality between these phenomena and the Mind-only from which they arise. In Mind-only, subject and object are not distinct. Subject

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[9] *Nonduality*, p. 277.

[10] *Nonduality p. 128.*

[11] *Nonduality*, p. 234.

[12] *Nonduality*, p. 195. Loy refers to the work of Edward Conze for this distinction.

and object are distinctions that we make or construct. A primary goal of Yogācāra Buddhism is to attain an *unconstructed awareness* of reality. In this Unconstructed Awareness, there is no longer any distinction between subject and object.

This idea of an Unconstructed Awareness is crucial to Loy's discussion of nonduality. Loy asserts that our perception begins with a "bare percept." This bare percept has no distinction between subject and object. Dualities like subject and object arise when conceptual constructs are "superimposed" on the percept. These superimpositions of thought construct our everyday dualistic experience.[14] In the Eastern nondual traditions, by techniques such as meditation, our everyday experience is deconstructed, so that we again "perceive" the world as it really is.[15] When these superimpositions are deconstructed, there is neither subject nor object in our immediate experience (whether that experience is in our perceptions, our actions or our thoughts). All that is left is the "bare percept", the Unconstructed Awareness.

Yogācāra Buddhism has many explicit passages that speak of the "identity" of subject and object.[16] Loy cites the following from Vasubandhu:

> Through the attainment of the state of Pure Consciousness, there is the non-perception of the perceivable; and through the non-perception of the perceivable (i.e., the object) there is the non-acquisition of the mind (i.e., the subject).
> Through the non-perception of these two, there arises the realization of the Essence of Reality (*dharmadhātu*).[17]

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[13] Hajime Nakamura: *Indian Buddhism* (Delhi: Motilal, 1987), Vol. I, p. 255.

[14] This does not necessarily assume the truth of the Constructivist Model, since Loy emphasizes that there can be an experience that is not constructed. Nevertheless, it seems to me that Loy gives too much deference to the Constructivist Model in his view of the constructed nature of our everyday dualistic reality. I would argue that there is a difference between saying that our superimpositions obscure the true nature of reality, and saying that our superimpositions construct all apparent differences and distinctions.

[15] This at least appears to have been Loy's view when *Nondualism* was first written. In his Introduction to the Paperback Edition (p. xii), he retreats from this view. He says that his former view–that nondual perception is a dis-covering of Reality–has the effect of reifying another duality: a duality between Reality and thought/language.

[16] Paul Griffiths says that this "identity" of cognized and cognizer is not to be understood in a Vedāntin monistic sense (in which the two are identical because of the view that there is only one unique undifferentiated substance in the world), but rather in the sense that both cognizer and cognized are concepts without any referent; they are constructed concepts. Paul Griffiths: "Pure Consciousness and Indian Buddhism", The *Problem of Pure Consciousness: Mysticism and Philosophy*, ed. Robert K.C. Forman (Oxford, 1990), p. 90.

[17] Vasubandhu, *Trisvabhāvanirdeśa*, 36-37; Cited in *Nonduality*, p. 29.

What is this state of Pure Consciousness referred to in Yogācāra Buddhism and how does it relate to the state of Unconstructed Awareness? Loy seems to regard them as the same. But according to Paul Griffiths, these states of consciousness are different, and the failure to distinguish between them has caused much confusion in philosophical discussions of nonduality.[18] In Pure Consciousness there is no content, whereas there is a content in Unconstructed Awareness.

b) Pure Consciousness

Griffiths says that the Indian Buddhist traditions describe a type of consciousness in which there are no mental events of any kind; it is a kind of trance. This is the attainment of cessation of consciousness (*nirodhasamāpatti*), or the cessation of sensation and conceptualization (*saṃjñāvedayitanirodha)*. It is described as being mindless (*acittaka*).

The path to achieving the cessation of consciousness is outlined in the Pāli *Dīghanikāya* (composed about 250 years after the death of the Buddha). Griffiths cites from that work the following standardized description of the ascending series of altered states of consciousness:

> By the transcendence of all conceptualizations of form, by the disappearance of conceptualizations based upon sense-data, by paying no attention to conceptualizations of manifoldness, having attained to the sphere of infinite space [the practitioner] remains therein, thinking space is unending. By entirely transcending the sphere of infinite space, having attained to the sphere of infinite consciousness [the practitioner] remains therein, thinking 'consciousness is infinite'. By entirely transcending the sphere of infinite consciousness, having attained to the sphere of nothing at all [the practitioner] remains therein, thinking 'there is nothing'. By entirely transcending the sphere of nothing at all, having entered the sphere of neither conceptualization nor non-conceptualization, [the practitioner] remains therein. By entirely transcending the sphere of neither conceptualization nor non-conceptualization, having attained the cessation of sensation and conceptualization, [the practitioner] remains therein.[19]

As one ascends through these stages, the mental functions become less and less, until they cease altogether.

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[18] Paul Griffiths: "Pure Consciousness and Indian Buddhism", *The Problem of Pure Consciousness: Mysticism and Philosophy*, ed. Robert K.C. Forman (Oxford, 1990).

[19] *Dīgha-nikāya*, tr. T.W. Rhys-Davids, Carpenter, and Estlin (1890-1911: II.71.2-17), cited by Griffiths at pp. 80, 81.

In the fifth century CE, Buddhaghosa wrote a commentary on the *Dīghanikāya*. Buddhaghosa also summarized the series of states of consciousness in *The path of purification (Visuddhimagga)*. He refers to the second stage as that of boundless consciousness (*viññāṇañcāyatana*). A deeper stage is that of 'no-thingness' (*ākiñcaññāyatana*). The cessation of consciousness is the sphere of 'neither perception-nor-nonperception' (*nevasaññānāsaññāyatana*).[20]

Yogācāra Buddhism uses this idea of cessation of consciousness. This is what Vasubandhu means by "Pure Consciousness" in the passage cited by Loy. It is the sphere of neither perception-nor-nonperception.

A problem with the idea of cessation of consciousness is that if there is no content in this state, how does the subject know at a later time that it was a different experience from the unconsciousness of dreamless sleep? And how does consciousness return if there has been a complete cessation of consciousness? These questions were debated within Buddhism. According to Griffiths, the Yogācāra idea of store-consciousness (*ālaya-vijñāna*) was developed to provide a causal basis for the return to consciousness from the state of Pure Consciousness. The store-consciousness is said to persist even in the apparently mindless attainment of cessation.[21] In one Yogācāra proof of the existence of this store-consciousness, one of the elements in the proof is the fact of entry into and exit from this attainment of cessation of consciousness.[22] This shows that Yogācāra continued to accept the idea of cessation of consciousness.

Griffiths says that, in Western terms, Pure Consciousness is like a cataleptic trance.[23] He describes this cessation of consciousness as similar to a state of hibernation. Respiration, heartbeat and body temperature are all lowered. There is no reaction to external stimuli and no initiation of action. There is also no internal mental life such as image-formation or dreaming. The method to bring about this is enstatic: the practitioner withdraws from every kind of

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[20] This summary is by J.S. Krüger: *Along Edges*, p. 289.

[21] Griffiths, *op. cit.* pp. 83-85.

[22] Griffiths, *op. cit.* p. 93, ft. 13.

[23] Griffiths, *op. cit.* p. 80.

interaction with the outside world (perceptual, cognitive, and affective) and reduces the content of her or his consciousness to zero.

How does such a state relate to the transcending of subject and object? Griffiths refers to such states that transcend subject and object as states of nondualistic consciousness. In nondualistic consciousness, there is "no structural opposition between subject and object, between apprehender and apprehended." A "structured opposition between subject and object" is that which "irresistibly leads the ostensible subject of an experience to separate herself or himself from the content of that experience. Such a separation is usually most naturally expressed in standard subject-object sentences."[24]

Griffiths says that Pure Consciousness is a kind of nondual consciousness, but only of a trivial or tautological kind. In a Pure Consciousness experience or trance, there is a cessation of consciousness. If there is a cessation of consciousness, then there can of course be no structured opposition of subject and object, and therefore no dualistic consciousness. Griffiths says that it is difficult to see what soteriological value (or even practical interest) such a cessation of consciousness can have.

Forman has a similar view of Pure Consciousness. He defines Pure Consciousness as "a wakeful, though contentless, nonintentional experience."[25] He compares it to a "Ganzfeld", a completely patternless visual field. In such an experience, observers have reported not merely seeing nothing, but of not seeing, a disappearance of the sense of vision. Observers did not know whether their eyes were open or not.[26]

Forman says that Pure Consciousness may be a relatively common experience in differing religious traditions, although some traditions might not even claim it. To the extent that people in various traditions have such a contentless experience, it may well be the same for each of them:

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[24] Griffiths, *op. cit.* p. 77. Instead of using intentional sentences with subject, predicate and object, Griffiths suggests using the words "event, phenomenological attribute and content to refer to nondualistic consciousness.

[25] Robert K.C. Forman: "Mysticism, Constructivism and Forgetting", *The Problem of Pure Consciousness: Mysticism and Philosophy* (Oxford, 1990), p. 8.

[26] Forman, *op. cit.* p. 36.

> A formless trance in Buddhism may be experientially indistinguishable from one in Hinduism or Christianity.[27]

Like Griffiths, Forman does not regard Pure Consciousness as having any soteriological significance in and of itself. He does, however acknowledge that it may play some preparatory role towards a more advanced spiritual life, such as *sahaja samādhi* in Ramaṇa's experience.[28] It could be argued that the attainment of Pure Consciousness leads to a further state of perception of unity in the world. Indeed, this is what Vasubandhu seems to say in the passage already referred to:

> Through the attainment of the state of Pure Consciousness, there is the non-perception of the perceivable; and through the non-perception of the perceivable (i.e., the object) there is the non-acquisition of the mind (i.e., the subject).
> Through the non-perception of these two, there arises the realization of the Essence of Reality (*dharmadhātu*).[29]

This Essence of Reality is Mind-only. Thus, even if Pure Consciousness is itself without content, it leads to the realization of Mind-only. This would be a true nondual consciousness, since there would be non-difference between phenomena and Mind-only which gives rise to phenomena.[30]

Some writers deny that Pure Consciousness is to be equated with cessation of consciousness. Krüger, for example, says that states of trance and ecstasy are not states of nonresponsiveness, but rather states of "superresponsiveness". In these states, the individual is "transpersonally decentralising the self, responding to a deeper and wider integration of things."[31] My response to this comment is that it is possible that going into a trance might assist a person to "decentralise the self." But any awareness of such decentralization would only be after coming out of the trance, when one might reflect on the previous experience. For example,

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[27] Forman, *op. cit.* p. 39.

[28] Forman, *op. cit.* p. 9. I discuss Ramaṇa's views on *samādhi* in more detail later in this chapter. As will be discussed, Abhishiktānanda also seems to view Pure Consciousness as a preparation for *sahaja samādhi*.

[29] Vasubandhu, *Trisvabhāvanirdeśa*, 36-37; Cited in *Nonduality*, p. 29.

[30] This solution would not be acceptable to Loy. He argues that Yogācāra, in positing Mind-Only as that which gives birth to all phenomena, has reified *śūnyatā*. He therefore sees Yogācāra as a lower truth to Mādhyamika Buddhism, which prefers to speak of *śūnyatā* and avoids naming anything, even the nondual whole. *Nonduality*, pp. 25, 215.

[31] J.S. Krüger: *Along Edges*, p. 289. He refers to Ken Wilber's explanation of "transpersonal".

one might reflect on one's continued existence despite the lack of any ego consciousness. The second part of Krüger's statement, that one is "responding to a deeper and wider integration of things" seems to be different than a cessation of consciousness. His view of "super-responsiveness" seems to refer more to the state of "Unconstructed Awareness".

c) Unconstructed Awareness

According to Griffiths, the idea of Unconstructed Awareness (*nirvikalpajñāna*) is largely a Yogācāra Buddhist idea.[32] According to this idea, one can have immediate consciousness of reality without reflecting any element of a conceptual scheme brought to the experience. Unconstructed Awareness is thus opposed to the Constructivist Model.[33]

In Unconstructed Awareness one is free from *vikalpa* or conceptual construction. The Sanskrit word *vikalpa* is a compound form the prefix *vi* (discrimination or bifurcation) and the root *kalpanā* (to construct mentally).[34] Our usual perception is *sa-vikalpa* (with thought construction).[35] *Nir-vikalpa* perception is without thought construction. There is an experience of bare sensation as distinguished from all thought about it, or what Loy calls the "bare percept."

What Griffiths emphasizes, and what Loy does not acknowledge, is that Unconstructed Awareness is different from Pure Consciousness.[36] Asaṇga, one of the *Yogācāra* Buddhists, explicitly rejects the idea that Unconstructed Awareness is any way like the attainment of cessation.[37] He also negates the idea that Unconstructed Awareness is without mental activity. It is also not the same as dreamless sleep or drunkenness. The difference from such states is that

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[32] Griffiths, *op. cit.* p. 75.

[33] The idea of Unconstructed Awareness does acknowledge that at least some of our everyday experience is constructed by our concepts. This may be the idea of an autonomous self, the subject/object division, or even, according to some "idealistic" accounts of nonduality, the whole of our empirical reality. Where the idea of Unconstructed Awareness differs from the Constructivist Model is in saying that we can escape these constructions. According to the Constructivist Model, no experience can go outside the conceptual frame that we bring to it.

[34] *Nonduality*, p. 43.

[35] The *Bodhisattvabhūmi* outlines eight categories of constructive activity of the mind. See Griffiths, *op. cit.* p. 86. The *Bodhisattvabhūmi* is one of the earliest Yogācāra texts (maybe from the fourth century CE).

[36] Loy does say that Rudolf Otto's distinction between an inward way of withdrawal and an outward way of merging with reality are two ways of expressing the same experience. *Nonduality*, p. 211. This does not really deal with the issue as to whether there is a cessation of consciousness.

[37] Asaṇga: *Mahāyanasaṃgraha*. See Griffiths, *op. cit.* p. 87.

Unconstructed Awareness has both an object (*dmigs/ālambana*) and some content (*rnam pa/ākāra*). Asaṇga says that the object of Unconstructed Awareness is the "indescribability of things" which is identified with the "Thusness of absence of self". Things are "indescribable" because the way we have of describing things, of dividing the world into subjects and predicates, is the product of the constructive activity of the mind. The world cannot be adequately described by language. But although we cannot *describe* the world as it is, it can be *experienced* in Unconstructed Awareness. Unlike Pure Consciousness, Unconstructed Awareness has a content.[38]

> The way the world actually is is pointed to by the *terminus technicus* "Thusness" (*tathatā*); this, too, is unpacked negatively. It consists in the fact that (what we take to be) independently subsisting entities, in fact, have no self, no enduring essence which gives them identity and marks them off from other things. What this amounts to is that the object of unconstructed awareness is the totality of things as they really are.[39]

An earlier *Yogācāra* text, the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* compares Unconstructed Awareness to mirrorlike awareness (*ādarsajñāna*). Griffiths comments on this awareness:

> …it is free from possessiveness (*amama*, lit. "without mine") and it does not confront (*āmukha*) objects of awareness (actual or potential things that one might be aware of). The commentators make these characteristics of mirrorlike awareness somewhat clearer: mirrorlike awareness is without possessiveness because it creates neither of the constructed ideas 'I' and 'mine,' and because (as would seem to follow) there is in it no division between subject and object. Further, it never confronts objects of awareness, in that it does not function in accordance with the usual divisions of objects of awareness into such things as physical form; this in turn, is because in mirrorlike knowledge there is no difference between apprehension and that which is to be apprehended.[40]

Unconstructed Awareness does not construct rigid divisions among objects of awareness, nor does it attribute defining characteristics to them. The key point seems to be that such awareness is without a constructed idea of 'I' or 'mine'. One learns to see oneself without an enduring substantive existence. Or, as Loy says, the awareness that was supposed to be

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[38] Griffiths does say that this content is "attenuated"; it is without the "defining marks" or those things that our constructive intellect develops in order to divide and classify objects in the world of experience.

[39] Griffiths, *op. cit.* p. 88.

[40] Griffiths, *op. cit.* p. 89.

observing the world is now realized to be one with it; there is no discrete ego consciousness.[41] This absence of enduring existence is extended to all events and "things." One sees *all* existents as without "self", without anything that definitively and eternally marks them off from other things.[42]

Griffiths says that, unlike Pure Consciousness, Unconstructed Awareness has a high soteriological status, especially in the Yogācāra school of Buddhism. Unconstructed Awareness (or unmediated consciousness) is a kind of nondualistic consciousness.[43] Whereas Pure Consciousness is nondual in a tautological way (there is no dual consciousness only because there is no consciousness), here there is a genuine nonduality of subject and object. What is such nondual perception like?

> It would consist in a series of presentations (*Vorstellungen, Vijñaptayaḥ*) without there being any sense of separation between the presentation in question and the subject "having" it. There would be a series of pictures without any viewer. It is important to note that the "pictures" in question could possess any degree of complexity (i.e., have as much content as required)…[44]

Unconstructed Awareness is a perception of the world "as it is" without thought construction. It is thus different from Pure Consciousness, which has no content or images. It may be that a state of Pure Consciousness, or trance, is necessary to reach this state of Unconstructed Awareness. But the distinction between the two states seems to be important. And, as we shall see, the distinction is maintained by both Ramaṇa and Abhishiktānanda.

3. Nondual perception in Vedānta Advaita

Loy points out that some Vedānta scholars have objected to speaking of "perception" in the nondual experience. In their view there is no doctrine of nondual perception in Vedānta.[45] Vedānta uses the word for perception (*pratyakṣa*) only in relation to the world of *māyā*. The nondual experience of *nirguṇa Brahman* is not perception at all. Although in this experience

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[41] *Nonduality*, p. 210.

[42] Griffiths, *op. cit.* pp. 89, 90.

[43] Other kinds of nondualistic consciousness cited by Griffiths include some drug experiences and many sexual and aesthetic experiences (p. 78).

[44] Griffiths, *op. cit.* p. 78.

there is a seer, the Self, there is nothing to *see*, for *Brahman* is One without a second. There is therefore no object to perceive. *Brahman* is Pure Consciousness, and shines of Itself. Because *Brahman* is self-luminous, it is not dependent on anything else for its manifestation. As the Bṛhadāranyaka Upanishad says,

> And when [it appears that] in deep sleep it does not see, yet it is seeing though it does not see; for there is no cessation of the vision of the seer, because the seer is imperishable. There is then, however, no second thing separate from the seer that it could see.[46]

If in our experience there is something else that is seen, it is a result of delusion, a result of *māyā* or ignorance (*avidyā*). Objects of consciousness that are not self-luminous are dependent on a subject to be conscious of them; they are mere appearance.[47]

Ramaṇa seems to agree with this view that when we reach the level of *nirguṇa Brahman*, there is no longer any perception:

> The duality of subject and object, the trinity of seer, sight and seen can exist only if supported by the One. If one turns inward in search of that One Reality, they fall away.[48]

Seer, sight and seen are only in the phenomenal world of *māyā*, which exists only because the One supports it. But in the inward search for that One Reality, these distinctions drop away, including seeing. At the level of the One, there is no longer any perception. *Brahman* shines of Itself.

Loy agrees that Vedānta limits the use of the term *pratyakṣa* for perception in the empirical world of *māyā*, and that Vedānta does not have a doctrine of nondual perception. For Vedānta, perception is always dualistic. Like all cognition, perception is due to *vṛttis*, the modifications of the *buddhi* (the mind). These *vṛttis* always constitute limiting conditions; *Brahman* therefore cannot be known through them. Our perception is therefore limited to the empirical world, and to *savikalpa* experience.

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[45] *Nonduality*, p. xi.

[46] Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upanishad IV.iii.23. Cited by Loy, *Nonduality*, p. 26.

[47] *Nonduality*, pp. 27, 65.

Loy says that whether or not we refer to "perception" in the nondual experience may be a matter of choice of terminology (like *pratyakṣa)*. He sometimes uses the word "intuition" instead of perception.[49] Nevertheless, he seeks to understand the Vedāntic *advaitic* experience in ways similar to his idea of nondual perception. To do this, Loy makes use of several ideas references in the post-Buddhistic Upanishads, references in the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, and the idea of *nirvikalpa* experience.

a) The post-Buddhistic Upanishads

Loy relies on the post-Buddhistic Upanishads in support of there being nondual perception in Hinduism. The *Māṇḍūkya Upanishad* describes *turīya*, the fourth and highest state of experience in terms of *prapañcopaśama*. This is a key term in Mahāyāna Buddhism. Nāgārjuna uses the word *prapañcopaśama* as meaning "the repose of all named things." It is a negative description of *nirvāṇa*, as the cessation of a dualistic way of perceiving. The *Śvetāśvatara Upanishad* uses the word *prapañca* to denote the phenomenal world of manifoldness that emanates from the creator. Loy says that the meaning of *prapañca* in Buddhism is "the differentiation of the nondual world of *nirvikalpa* experience into the discrete-objects-of-the-phenomenal world, which occurs due to *savikalpa* thought-construction.[50] These *Upanishads* therefore support the idea that nondual perception is what occurs when thought construction ceases.

Abhishiktānanda refers to these post-Buddhistic Upanishads. He is sometimes critical of them. For example, he says that in the *Śvetāśvatara Upanishad* dialectic has begun to "dry up"

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[48] Cited in *Nonduality*, p. 27 from *Teachings of Ramana Maharshi* (Osborne, 1977), p. 251. See also *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi,* p. 160 [*Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*] "In the non-dual Brahman the threefold reality of seer, sight, and seen does not exist."

[49] *Nonduality*, p. 68.

[50] *Nonduality*, pp. 53, 54.

intuition.[51] He quotes the *Māṇḍūkya Upanishad* in reference to the states of consciousness, including the fourth, *turīya*.[52]

b) The *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*

In Chapter III of this thesis, we discussed Ramaṇa's view that the world is not totally unreal. The world is *anirvacanīya* or indeterminable as either real or unreal. Ramaṇa emphasizes certain verses from Shankara's *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*. Loy makes reference to one of these same verses, verse 521:

> The universe is an unbroken series of perceptions of Brahman; hence it is in all respects nothing but Brahman.[53]

We can therefore "perceive" *Brahman* in the universe. Loy sees the statement as meaning, "Reality is staring us in the face all the time, but somehow we misperceive it." Ramaṇa makes a similar statement: "We are actually experiencing the Reality only; still, we do not know it."[54] The ignorant thus do not see *Brahman* in the universe. Loy comments,

> Taking the pluralistic universe of material objects to be real–which constitutes *māyā*–is like seeing a rope as a snake. Just as we would say afterward that we had really been seeing a rope, so "we" must actually be perceiving (or "experiencing") Brahman all the time, although we are ignorant of it–exactly what Śaṅkara says in the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* verse [521]…[55]

The *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* therefore seems to support the view that there can be a kind of nondual "perception." There is false perception and true nondual perception. What causes us to mistake the rope for a snake? The ignorant do not see *Brahman* in the universe because of superimposition or *savikalpa* thought construction. When these superimposed concepts are

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[51] *Letters*, p. 273 (MC, 26.6.72). Nevertheless, Abhishiktānanda also quotes from this *Upanishad*. See for example *Further Shore*, p. 80.

[52] *Further Shore,* p. 104.

[53] *Nonduality*, p. 39. The citation is from the translation by Mādhavānanda (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrams, 1974), p. 194.

[54] *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, p. 131. Ramaṇa refers to the *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha* in support of this statement.

[55] *Nonduality*, p. 66.

removed, we experience *Brahman* or Reality. Our thought constructions prevent us from seeing the "true" nondual nature of reality.

But there is a difference between this statement in the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* and Loy's view of nondual perception. After interpreting the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* in accordance with the analogy of seeing a rope as a snake, Loy goes on to say,

> The analogy would further seem to imply–indeed, it can hardly be meaningful otherwise–that Brahman should not be characterized as transcendental to sense-perception, although of course "It" cannot be perceived as an *object*.[56]

Loy's view of nondual perception is opposed to any two-tier view of reality. He wants to read into this verse a Buddhist interpretation that *saṁsāra* is *nirvāna* and that there are not two levels of Reality. He refers to the fact that Gauḍapāda and Śaṇkara were known to have been influenced by Mahāyāna Buddhism, even to the extent they were both accused of being "hidden Buddhists." He also believes that Vedānta borrowed the notion of *prapañcopaśama* from Buddhism.[57] He argues that seeing *Brahman* in the universe is equivalent to the Buddhist idea of the "repose of all things" once superimposition has ceased. To see *Brahman* in this way does not require a two-tier view of Reality.

The *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* does not necessarily support Loy's interpretation. The statement that the universe is "nothing but Brahman" is also consistent with a monistic view: the universe is "nothing but *Brahman*" because only *Brahman* is real. The ignorant do not know this, but when their veil of ignorance is lifted, only *Brahman* will be seen. Thus, this verse in the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* could also be used in support of a doctrine of monism that denies any reality to the world.

We could also interpret this verse from the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* as saying that the universe is an unbroken series of perceptions of *Brahman* because *Brahman* pervades the universe of *māyā*. This interpretation is supported by passages from the Upanishads that speak of *Brahman* as pervading the universe:

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[56] *Ibid.*

[57] But if Lacombe is correct, Shankara knew only the Bṛhadāraṇyaka, Chāndogya, Taittirīya, Kauṣītakī and Kena Upanishads; he did not have knowledge of the later Kaṭha, Śvetāsvatara, Mahānavayta, Iśa, Muṇḍaka, Praśna or the Post-Buddhistic Maitrī and Māṇḍūkya Upanishads. Olivier Lacombe: *L'Absolu selon Vedanta* (Paris, 1937), p. 9.

> This Self has entered into these bodies up to the very tips of the nails, as a razor lies [hidden] in its case, or as fire, which sustains the world, [lies hidden] in its source.[58]
>
> As the same nondual fire, after it has entered the world, becomes different according to whatever it burns, so also the same nondual *Ātman*, dwelling in all beings, becomes different according to whatever IT enters. And IT exists also without.[59]

Loy refers to these passages in the Upanishads as implying "another intermediate position between monism and pluralism": that the ā*tman* functions as a first cause which created the phenomenal world and then pervades it as a kind of spiritual essence. Loy rejects this distinction between pervader and pervaded. He says that neither Huang Po [Ch'an Buddhism] nor Shankara would accept such a distinction between pervader and pervaded.[60] To see *Brahman* "in" the universe is for Loy to set up a duality between different Realities.

Whether or not Shankara would accept this view of the universe being pervaded by *Brahman*, it seems to be more in line with Ramaṇa's interpretation of the *Vivekacūdāmani*.[61] Ramaṇa does not deny all reality to the world; in fact, he relies on this verse to show the reality of the universe. But Ramaṇa is also very clear that there are levels of Reality. Although *Brahman* may be perceived in the universe, *Brahman* is a higher reality. The universe is real only because it is supported by *Brahman*.[62] Seeing *Brahman* in the world therefore means seeing the Self as the substratum of all that is seen. Ramaṇa makes the comparison to movies projected on the screen. The movies have a reality, but they do not exist without the screen. The pictures are appearances that come and go, but the screen remains.[63]

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[58] Bṛhadāranyaka Upanishad I.iv.7. Cited in *Nonduality*, p. 24.

[59] Kaṭha Upanishad II.ii.9, Cited in *Nonduality*, p. 24.

[60] *Nonduality*, p. 24. Loy says that these Upanishads are unrigorous, that they are "mystical rather than systematic philosophy." This is a rather odd criticism coming from Loy. Presumably by "rigour" Loy means conceptual rigour, the very type of thinking which he later criticizes.

[61] This was also the view of Gnānānanda: "God pervades the whole creation." *Sadguru*, p. 288.

[62] Loy acknowledges Vedānta's two levels of reality and its view that the universe is real only because Brahman supports it. But for Loy, this causes a problem in determining the nature of *māyā*. To say that it is neither real nor unreal, and that it is indeterminable and indefinable, is for Loy "an admission of failure." *Nonduality*, pp. 62 and 68.

[63] *Teachings of Ramana Maharshi*, p. 192.

Abhishiktānanda makes frequent reference to seeing *Brahman* "in" the universe. In many of these passages, Abhishiktānanda clearly holds to a view of two levels of reality, the Transcendent and the immanent. *Brahman* is the Transcendent Reality that is also wholly immanent. The Transcendent *Brahman* is known immanently by the "ascent to the depth of the heart." Whether or not Abhishiktānanda consistently maintains such a two-tier view of Reality is something that will be explored in a later chapter of this thesis.

c) *Savikalpa* and *nirvikalpa* experience

Loy also refers to the use of the terms *savikalpa* and *nirvikalpa* in Hinduism. The *Nyāyā* system or *darśana* within Hinduism uses the distinction. *Nirvikalpa* is perception that is "unassociated with a name" (*avyapadeśya*) whereas *savikalpa* is "well-defined" (*vyasvasāyātmaka*). When our perception becomes associated with language it becomes "determinate." Prior to the association of our perception with language, there is an earlier stage where it is unassociated with language and is a "bare sensation."[64]

Are the terms *savikalpa* and *nirvikalpa* also used in Vedānta? The word *vikalpa* is sometimes used by Shankara. But he usually uses the related idea of superimposition (*adhyāsa*). He uses the word 'superimposition' in the analogies of mistaking the rope for a snake, mistaking the world for the Self. Gauḍapāda also uses the word *vikalpa*. It is Potter's view that Gauḍapāda does not use the word in the sense of "constructing", but rather in the sense of a failure to properly understand or interpret something.

> …the fact that I wrongly interpret something, say the rope as a snake, does not necessarily imply that I apparently produce the snake.[65]

d) *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha*

A text that Loy does not mention is the *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha*, which, as we have seen, influenced Ramaṇa. It makes extensive use of the term *nirvikalpa*. The *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha* was influenced by Buddhism, and some have said that it is specifically related to Yogācāra

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[64] *Nonduality*, p. 43.

[65] Karl Potter, ed.: *Advaita Vedānta up to Śaṃkara and His Pupils* (Princeton, 1981), pp. 65, 68. This view of *vikalpa* accords better with the criticism I have given of the Constructivist Model: that it is a mistake to say that our construction can create content.

Buddhism. Parallels to Yogācāra Buddhism are its description of mind as a creative force, the negation of the reality of the world and the claim that all appearances proceed from the mind.[66]

According to Andrew Fort, the *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha* played a large role in popularizing the idea of the *jīvanmukta*, the one who is liberated while still in a body. It also played a role in developing what Fort refers to as "Yogic Advaita."[67] Yogic Advaita continued Shankara's idea that knowledge of the nondual Self brings liberation. It also emphasized certain Buddhist ideas, as well as Yogic practices, such as exerting control of mental states. It urged "destroying the mind". We should destroy the *vāsanās*, mental impressions which are the cause of bondage.

The *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha* speaks of *nirvikalpa samādhi* in which "there is no movement of thought."[68] But what is interesting is that when the *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha* speaks of a state of *nirvikalpa samādhi*, there remains a kind of perception. It tells the story of Līlā, who enters into *nirvikalpa samādhi*. It is said that she was in the infinite space of consciousness, and yet she can see the king, although he cannot see her.[69] She was on another plane of consciousness.

The continuance of perception is probably related to the idea of *jīvanmukti*. For the one who is liberated in this life, certain *vāsanās* remain. But they are pure (*śuddha*) *vāsanās* that are free from joy and sorrow and cause no further birth. Fort comments:

> Even though awake, the *mukta's vāsanās* and *vṛttis* are at rest. Thus, the liberated being is often described as "asleep while awake"' detached and desireless, doing all while doing nothing, having perfect equanimity in activity. When acting with a one-pointed "sleep mind," this being is not a doer and acts without bondage.[70]

Just as in deep sleep one experiences no duality or suffering, so in the *vāsanā*-less state, the knower has equanimity and a kind of coolness. This is the *turīya* or fourth state. There is a

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[66] Christopher Chapple finds a relation to Yogacara's idea of mind only from the *Lankāvatāra Sutra.* He says there is a reciprocity between what is perceived and the means of perception. "The notions of agent, action and result, seer, sight, seen and so forth are all only thought (III: 103:18). *Swami Venkatesananda: The Concise Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha* (State University of New York Press, 1984), p. xiii, ft. 10.

[67] Andrew O. Fort: *Jīvanmukti in Transformation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), p. 85.

[68] Christopher Chapple, Introduction to T*he Concise Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), p. xiii.

[69] T*he Concise Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha*, pp. 53, 57.

[70] Fort, *op. cit*. p. 94.

state beyond even this, called the *turīyātīta*, a nondual "state" beyond great (and no) bliss. It is associated with bodiless liberation, which is even higher than liberation in the body.

In another passage from the *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha*, the sage Vāṣiṣṭha tells Rāma that *samādhi* is where one realizes the objects of the senses in a state of "not-self" and thus enjoys inner calmness and tranquillity at all times. If one can mentally renounce all false identification of the self with objects, one can then live where one likes, either at home or in a mountain-cave. If the mind is at peace and if there is no ego-sense, even cities are as void. On the other hand, forests are like cities to him whose heart is full of desires and other evils.[71] This is the idea of the *jīvanmukta*, the one who is liberated while alive, but who still lives in the world.

To attain liberation, one must abandon the aspect of the mind called the "I" notion, *ahamkāra*, *ahambhāva*.[72] *Samādhi* is specifically said to be the same whether one is is engaged in constant action or in contemplation. Thus, it is not limited to a state of trance, since in a trance, one would not be able to be in a state of action. The emphasis is on attaining a state of egolessness:

> Knowledge of truth, Lord, is the fire that burns up all hopes and desires as if they are dried blades of grass. That is what is known by the word *samādhi* in which there is eternal satisfaction, clear perception of what is, egolessness, not being subject to the pairs of opposites, freedom from anxiety and from the wish to acquire or to reject.[73]

In *samādhi* there is "clear perception of what is." This is not a cessation of consciousness, but a state of egolessness. This egolessness is obtained when one realizes that the light rays are not different from the sun, that the waves are not different form the ocean, that the bracelet is not different from gold, that the sparks are not different from the fire. Someone who has seen this true has an understanding that is said to be unmodified (*nirvikalpa*). We are to

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[71] T*he Concise Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha*, p. 222.

[72] Fort, *op. cit*. p. 92.

[73] T*he Concise Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha*, p. 227.

abandon the perception of diversity or objectification and remain established in the *nirvikalpa* consciousness. Then we do not get enmeshed in the objects.[74]

e) Ramaṇa: *sahaja samādhi*

Ramaṇa distinguishes between a state of trance (which he calls *nirvikalpa samādhi*) and the highest state of consciousness, *sahaja samādhi*. He describes this state of *sahaja samādhi* in terms that are clearly related to the idea of *jīvanmukti* in the *Yoga Vāṣiṣtha*:

> In yoga the term is used to indicate some kind of trance and there are various kinds of *samādhi*. But the *samādhi* I speak to you about is different. It is *sahaja samādhi*. In this state you remain calm and composed during activity. You realize that you are moved by the deeper Real self within and are unaffected by what you do or say or think. You have no worries, anxieties or cares, for you realize that there is nothing that belongs to you as ego and that everything is being done by something with which you are in conscious union.[75]

Ramaṇa says that a trance is only temporary in its effects; there is no use of trance, unless it brings about enduring peace of mind. There is happiness so long as the trance lasts. But after rising from it the old *vāsanās* (latent ideas and forms of the mind) return. Unless the *vāsanās* are destroyed in *sahaja samādhi* there is no good in trance.[76]

To a questioner who continued to ask about the importance of trance, Ramaṇa replied,

> If you are so anxious for trance any narcotic will bring it about. Drug-habit will be the result and not liberation. There are *vāsanās* in the latent state even in trance. The *vāsanās* must be destroyed.[77]

Ramaṇa distinguishes these levels of *samādhi:*

(1) Holding on to Reality is *samadhi*.
(2) Holding on to Reality with effort is *savikalpa samadhi*.
(3) Merging in Reality and remaining unaware of the world is *nirvikalpa samadhi.*
(4) Merging in Ignorance and remaining unaware of the world is sleep.

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[74] T*he Concise Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha*, p. 400. Part of this realization is also that the world is unreal. Whatever the self contemplates is materialized on account of the inherent power in consciousness. That materialized thought then shines as if it is independent.

[75] *The Teachings of Ramana Maharshi*, p. 185.

[76] *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, p. 279.

[77] *Ibid*. p. 280.

(5) Remaining in the primal, pure natural state without effort is *sahaja nirvikalpa samadhi.*[78]

In sleep, the mind is alive, but sunk into oblivion. In *savikalpa samadhi*, the mind jumps from one object to another. All kinds of thoughts rise up from the Reality within and "manifest themselves."

In *nirvikalpa samādhi*, which Ramaṇa also calls *kevala samādhi*, the mind is alive, but "sunk in life", "like a bucket with a rope left lying in the water in the well to be drawn out." One can come out of the state. It is therefore temporary, a mere suppression (*laya*) of consciousness, a state of trance. It is the *samādhi* of nondifferentiation; it consists of "pure consciousness", which is capable of illumining knowledge or ignorance.[79] *Nirvikalpa samadhi* is the merging in the one Reality that underlies all phenomena and the remaining unaware of all transitory manifestations. The state is compared to a waveless ocean. In *nirvikalpa samadhi* one is unaware of anything but the inmost Being. It therefore appears that Ramaṇa means a state of Pure Consciousness when he refers to *nirvikalpa samādhi*.[80]

In *sahaja samādhi*, the mind is "dead", "resolved into the self, like a river discharged into the ocean and its identity lost." And yet, although the mind is "dead", in s*ahaja samadhi* one is able to continue to function in the world after enlightenment. The enlightened one lives as a *jīvanmukta*.

Sahaja, the highest state of consciousness is not withdrawal from the world or a cessation of activity. A person who has attained Realization may or may not withdraw from active life. Some realized persons carry on trade or business or rule a Kingdom like Rāma as described in the *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha*. Realization does not mean being inert like a stone or becoming nothing:

> Then how would it differ from deep sleep? Besides, it would be a state which, however exalted, comes and goes and would therefore not be the natural and normal state, so how could it represent the eternal presence of the Supreme Self, which persists through all states, and survives them? It is true that there is such a state and that in the case of some people it may be necessary to go through it. It

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[78] *Ibid.* pp. 357, 358.

[79] *Ibid.* p. 167.

[80] Loy uses the word *nirvikalpa* to refer to Unconstructed Awareness, which corresponds to Ramaṇa's idea of *sahaja*.

> may be a temporary phase of the quest or persist to the end of a man's life, if it be the Divine Will or the man's destiny, but in any case you cannot call it the highest state. If it were you would have to say that not only the Sages, but God Himself has not attained the highest state, since not only are the Realized Sages very active but the Personal God (*Iśvara*) himself is obviously not in this supremely inactive state, since he presides over the world and directs its activities.[81]

Ramaṇa says that *sahaja samādhi* is preferable to *nirvikalpa*, because even if one is immersed in *nirvikalpa samādhi* for years, after emerging from it one will find oneself in one's environment. One should be in spontaneous *samādhi*–in one's pristine or natural state–in the midst of every environment.[82] In the natural state of *sahaja* we do not go into *samādhi* and out again. We no longer have to make conscious efforts to keep the mind one-pointed or free from thought.[83]

Ramaṇa was asked which state of *samādhi* he was in. He said that if his eyes were closed, it was *nirvikalpa*; if open it was (though differentiated, still in absolute repose) *savikalpa*. He said that s*ahaja* is the ever-present state, the "natural state."[84]

Ramaṇa refers to *samādhi* in his translation of the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*. To attain *samādhi*, it is helpful "to regard everything as *Brahman*." The result will be that the frail tendencies of the ego will disappear like darkness before the sun.[85] In *sahaja* one sees only the Self, and one sees the world as a form assumed by the Self.[86] The importance of regarding everything as *Brahman* seems to indicate that perception continues after one attains *sahaja*. The state is not just one of pure consciousness, but a state in which there is some content.

Forman comments on Ramaṇa's distinction between *samādhi* and *sahaja samādhi.* In Forman's opinion, *sahaja samādhi* involves both external activity and some sort of internal

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[81] *The Teachings of Ramana Maharshi*, p. 185.

[82] *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, p. 59. Ramaṇa refers to the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* to support this priority of *sahaja samādhi*. It appears that he is referring to the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*'s emphasis on the *jīvanmukta.*

[83] *The Teachings of Ramana Maharshi*, p. 185.

[84] *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, p. 13. It is interesting that Ramaṇa uses the word "absolute repose" here, and in reference to *savikalpa*. It will be recalled that this is Nāgārjuna's closest definition of *nirvana.*

[85] *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, p. 153.

[86] *The Teachings of Ramana Maharshi*, p. 184.

quiet. He thus sees it as more complex than introvertive *samādhi* or "pure consciousness." He points out that Ramaṇa's experience of *samādhi* preceded *sahaja samādhi* by several years.

> *Samādhi* is a contemplative mystical state and is "introvertive" as Stace employs the term. *Sahaja samādhi* is a state in which a silent level within the subject is maintained along with (simultaneously with) the full use of the human faculties. It is, hence, continuous through part or all of the twenty-four-hour cycle of (meditative and nonmeditative) activity and sleep. This distinction seems to be key: introvertive mysticism denotes a transient state (after all, no one who eats and sleeps can remain entranced forever), whereas extrovertive mysticism denotes a more permanent state, one that lasts even while one is engaged in activity.[87]

Forman therefore makes a correlation between Stace's ideas of extrovertive mysticism and Ramaṇa's *sahaja samādhi*.[88] In extrovertive mysticism, one "perceives a new relationship–one of unity, blessedness, reality between external world and the self."

But the correlation with Stace's ideas is not quite as straightforward as this. Ramaṇa's *sahaja samādhi* is related to the idea of *jīvanmukti*, liberation in the body. And there is a conflict within Vedānta regarding the nature of such liberation, and even whether such liberation is possible. For example, in the *Brahmasūtras* liberation (*brahma-loka*) is reached only after death. Rāmānuja says that liberation with a body is as absurd as saying "my mother is childless."[89] Even within the *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha*, which popularized the idea of *jīvanmukti*, liberation after death (*videhamukti*) is accorded a higher status. The main problem for Vedānta with the idea of liberation in the body is that if the body is the result of ignorance (*avidyā*), how can the body (and any ignorance) remain after liberation? Vedānta's main solution is the idea that the body continues to exist by reason of past *karma* (*prārabdha karma*). This is *karma* that was incurred prior to liberation. After liberation, its force continues until it is spent, like the continued whirling of a potter's wheel. The *jīvanmukta* can continue to operate in the world only because of this past karma. Final release or liberation occurs at the time of death when the body is "dropped".

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[87] Forman, *op. cit.* p. 8. Forman cites Monier-Williams' definition of *sahaja*: a quality as a disposition or a constant feature.

[88] See W.T. Stace: *Mysticism and Philosophy* (London: Macmillan, 1960).

[89] Fort, *op. cit.* pp. 26, 78. He cites Rāmānuja's *Śrī bhāsya I.1.4.*

Ramaṇa refers to this idea of *prārabdha karma*, although he says that it is an explanation that is given only to satisfy the enquirer. From the *jñāni's* point of view there is only the Self manifesting itself in variety.[90] Although other people see the *jīvanmukta* acting in the world, the *jivanmukta* is not conscious of this:

> Like a passenger asleep in a carriage, a *jñāni* in *sahaja samādhi* is unaware of the happening, waking, dream and deep sleep. In *kevala samādhi*, the activities (vital and mental), waking, dream and sleep, are only merged, ready to emerge after regaining the state other than *samādhi*. In *sahaja samādhi* the activities, vital and mental, and the three states are destroyed, never to reappear. However, others notice the *jñāni* active e.g. eating, talking, moving etc. He is not himself aware of these activities, whereas others are aware of his activities. They pertain to his body and not to his Real Self, *swarupa*. For himself, he is like the sleeping passenger–or like a child interrupted from sound sleep and fed, being unaware of it.[91]

Sahaja samādhi is like being asleep in the waking state (*jagrat sushupti*).[92] In *sahaja*, the mind has resolved itself into the Self and has been lost. Differences and obstructions therefore do not exist. The activities of such a being are like the feeding of a somnolent boy, perceptible to the onlooker (but not to the subject). "Similarly the *sahaja jnānī* remains unaware of his bodily activities because his mind is dead–having been resolved in the ecstasy of *Chid Ananda* (Self).[93] This explanation of *jīvanmukti* tends towards a monistic view of Self. It devalues the world and the nondual perception of that world.

Was Ramaṇa truly unaware of objects in the world? He certainly seemed to be aware of those people who asked him questions. He also participated in some activities, such as preparing food in the kitchen, and reading newspapers and correspondence. One early disciple commented on the fact that the exterior world was in fact of interest to Ramaṇa. Ramaṇa was the most normal person he had ever found. He was able to think and to reason in response to questions. Even when he sat seemingly utterly absorbed in Self, he would become alert if someone nearby mispronounced a word in reciting a verse. It therefore can not be said that his mind was dead in the sense of "pure consciousness." His mind was functioning, but as a *jīvanmukti*, "as one who

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[90] *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, p. 349.

[91] *Ibid.* p. 84.

[92] *Ibid.* p. 339.

[93] *Ibid.* p. 154.

is wholly awake but at the same time free of characteristics of the state of wakening, and free of all desire and of a sense of separate ego." [*Vivekacūdāmani* v. 429][94]

Abhishiktānanda comments on the difficulty of understanding what Ramaṇa's consciousness as a *jīvanmukta* was like:

> They say that for him who is no longer aware of *śariram* [the body], all is clear. But what exactly does that mean? Ramana, for example, took his meals, was *interested* in food, its preparation, etc. I am afraid that the *idea* that we make for ourselves of this (experience of) non-awareness is false. (…) it is only ignorance that sees a difference between the *jivan-mukta* and the *other*. I think that this duality which we assert between *advaita* and *dvaita* is precisely our mistake.[95]

There seems to be some confusion in Ramaṇa's own explanations of the *jīvanmukti* state of consciousness. On the one hand, he says there is an annihilation of mind, a state of no-mind where one is not aware of any others.[96] This acosmic state is related to a monistic view of reality. In this viewpoint, the world of *māyā* is not given much (if any) reality. In this connection, Ramaṇa sometimes holds to an idealist view of the world. For example, he says that the phenomenal world is nothing but thought. When the world recedes from one's view–that is, when one is free from thought–the mind enjoys the Bliss of the Self. Conversely, when the world appears–that is, when thought occurs–the mind experiences pain and anguish.[97] This idealist, acosmic, and monistic view appears to be related to an emphasis on the state of "Pure Consciousness".

On the other hand, Ramaṇa also says that the *jīvanmukta's* consciousness is not based on the ego. In the *sahaja* consciousness, one sees *Brahman* everywhere. This view grants more reality to the world, and is related to the state of Unconstructed Awareness, where one sees reality as it is. Müller-Ortega is helpful here in pointing out that *jīvanmukti* is a *tantric* idea. Practitioners of tantra reacted against the Upanishadic spirit of renunciation. They tried to reconcile the ascent to *mokśa* or liberation with the experience of joyful enjoyment of the world, *bhoga*. A *tantric* jī*vanmukta* becomes a man-god. He or she is

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[94] Swami Siddheswarananda in *Études sur Ramana Maharshi,* ed. Jean Herbert (Dervy, 1972), pp. 181-182.

[95] *Letters*, p. 293 (MC 12.4.73).

[96] *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, p. 552.

[97] "Who am I?", *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, p. 46.

> …a divinized being acting within the world rather than seeking to transcend it. Thus, the search is not just for a freedom that releases a person from suffering and transmigration, but for a powerful, even magical perfection (*siddhi*) and autonomy (*svātantrya*).[98]

The *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha* speaks of *bhoga*. So does Ramaṇa. He says that there are two kinds of *vāsānas*: *bandha hetuh*, causing bondage for the ignorant and *bhoga hetuh*, giving enjoyment for the wise. The latter do not obstruct realization.[99] If that is so, then it was Ramaṇa's view that not all *vasānas* are destroyed in the *advaitic* experience.[100]

I conclude that Ramaṇa's equivocation as to the nature of the *sahaja* state is due to a conflict in Vedāntic ideas about *jīvanmukti*. On the one hand, he wishes to affirm the Upanishadic renunciation of the world. This view of realization is acosmic, and in line with a Pure Consciousness experience. On the other, Ramaṇa affirms some *tantric* ideas of the reality of the world, and the life of the *jīvanmukta*–the one who attained liberation in life. The *sahaja* view of realization is more that of Unconstructed Awareness, a seeing of unity and connectedness within the world. These two different viewpoints are also evident in Abhishiktānanda's thought, and he, too sometimes confuses them.

A more consistent view of *jīvanmukti* is given by Aurobindo. Fort says that Aurobindo's perspective is more world-affirming than Shankara or Ramaṇa:

> Since Aurobindo holds that existence, from grossest Matter to highest Spirit, is an integral unity, the deluded individuated self (*jīva*) is real and can evolve back to its Spiritual basis (Supermind). Put another way, for Aurobindo *brahman* includes *māyā*, and *māyā* is dynamic (*śakti*), including its derivations of mind and body. True (integral) liberation is not separation from *saṁsāra*, but realization of the Divine (*brahman*) in the Divine.[101]

For Aurobindo, there is therefore no problem in remaining embodied after liberation. He does not have to deal with the problem of remaining ignorance or *karma*.

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[98] Müller-Ortega, Paul E.: *The Triadic Heart of Siva* (State University of New York Press, 1989) p. 50.

[99] *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, p. 280. Similarly, there are some intentions (*sankalpas*) which may be cultivated by the *jñāni*: p. 108.

[100] In addition to *tantric* influences, we may also look to *Śaiva* Siddhanta and to Kashmir *Śaivism* for emphases on enjoyment in the world.

[101] Fort, *op. cit.* p. 150.

f) Gnānānanda: *sahaja samādhi*

Like Ramaṇa, Gnānānanda distinguishes between different kinds of *samādhi.* In *savikalpa samādhi*, there is an awareness of oneself as distinct, some "memory" of oneself. In *nirvikalpa samādhi*, there is no longer a distinction between outward or inward, or between self and other. It is an ecstasy which is enstasis, and an enstasis which is ecstasy; there is no 'outer' (ek-stasis) which is not fulfilled and completed in what is 'inward', and no 'inward' (en-stasis) whose inwardness does not include the whole of being. In that state,

> Nothing any more makes an impact on either the physical senses of the mind. You can [no] longer think or feel. People can touch you, move you about, lift you up, but you remain totally unaware of it. It is fullness, it is bliss…[102]

Nirvikalpa samādhi is therefore a kind of trance state.

But the state of *sahaja samādhi* is "even more exalted" than *nirvikalpa samādhi*. This state is achieved when you have reached the original state of the self:

> Here you have passed beyond both enstasis and ecstasy. Differences are no longer perceived anywhere. The *jnānī* lives in the world like every one else; he eats, drinks, sleeps and walks about, just like everyone else. However, while others are primarily aware of the diversity of things, the *jnānī* sees them in their unity. In finding the Self, he finds himself and the self in everything. The *ego* has disappeared, which formerly came between "him", "himself", and other people, indeed, between his awareness of himself and his real being. Nothing henceforth obstructs the perception of reality in itself.[103]

This description of *sahaja* as an experience of unity with the world and loss of ego consciousness sounds more like Unconstructed Awareness than Pure Consciousness. We see the Self (or God or *Brahman*) in the world and in the "mirror of the heart." When we see God in the universe, then we see his form with duality. When we see God "in the mirror of the heart", then we see unity:

> God is everywhere present indivisibly, *a-khanda* […] The heart is the mirror in which he is seen. When he is seen in the universe, then his form is diversified, *bheda*, *dvaita*. When he is seen in the mirror of the heart, he is seen just as he is

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[102] *Guru*, p. 73.

[103] *Ibid*.

in himself, undivided, *a-khanda*, without any limitation or otherness, in the nonduality of being.[104]

B. Abhishiktānanda and Nondual Perception

1. The four states of consciousness

Indian thought refers to the stages of consciousness: waking, sleep and deep sleep. There is also a fourth stage, the *turīya* that is beyond all these states; this is the goal to be achieved in our consciousness. What does this mean? Is the *turīya* to be seen as a kind of sleep? Heidegger made the comment that "For Indians sleep is the highest life." But as Mehta points out, no Indian texts state this.[105] What it does mean is that our waking state is not to be regarded as paradigmatic.[106] When we regard the waking state as primary, we regard thinking as the very essence of how humans are. But this is to miss out on the truly authentic mode of being, the fourth state (*turīya*) where we are at one with our essential nature, pure awareness. This is beyond both waking and sleeping.[107]

All three states–waking, dreaming, deep sleep– are interpreted from the perspective of the fourth state of consciousness, *turīya*. The *turīya* is therefore not to be identified with any of the three states. Abhishiktānanda expresses this idea when he says that the final stage of human consciousness is the *turīya*; free from the limitations of the previous states, but with all their positive characteristics:

- it has the simplicity and freedom from admixture of *suṣupti* (deep sleep)
- it has the sovereignty and freedom relative to time and place as manifested in dreams
- it has the fullness of clarity of the waking state[108]

Ramaṇa also interprets the *turīya* as beyond both the waking and sleeping states. He says that this fourth stage is really our natural state [*sahaja*], the under-current in all the three

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[104] *Guru*, p. 77; *Diary*, p. 146 (6.3.56).

[105] J.L. Mehta: *Philosophy and Religion*, pp. 54-56.

[106] See J.S. Krüger: *Along Edges*, p. 282. Krüger says that modern North Americans tend toward monophasic consciousness, regarding only the waking phase as valid ('normal').

[107] J.L. Mehta: *Philosophy and Religion*, pp. 56, 59.

[108] *Abhishiktānanda*: "The Upanishads and the Advaitic Experience", *Clergy Monthly,* Dec., 1974, p. 480.

states.[109] It is also not a state of trance, since this *sahaja* state is the state of the *jīvanmukta* who moves about and acts in the world.

Unfortunately, Abhishiktānanda is inconsistent in what he says about the states of consciousness. He sometimes views liberation in terms of trance. In a *Diary* entry from 1953, he refers to the young Ramaṇa's trance in the Pātāla Linga, an underground chamber in the Arunāchala temple. He says that Ramaṇa's experience was *enstasis*, and he then relates it to the depth of dreamless sleep [*sushupti*]:

> There exists in the depth of oneself a very deep place which continues to exist during dreamless sleep [*sushupti*], and is inaccessible to all superficial consciousness. It is in this abyss, in this Pātāla that the encounter takes place[110]

Abhishiktānanda goes on to say that this encounter with the Self is not perceived by the eyes, ears, thought or even non-thought. Abhishiktānanda therefore interprets the experience in terms of Pure Consciousness or trance.

In *Guhāntara*, Abhishiktānanda writes about the fourth state *turīya.* He describes it as the transcendent mystical state where there is neither interior nor exterior knowledge. Its essence is the experience of one's own self, which is without diversity or duality. Here he relates it to the state of *kevala* (or *nirvikalpa samādhi*).[111]

In 1972, Abhishiktānanda writes about the three states. He says that one must discover the *I* that is the same, unaffected by waking, dreaming, and sleeping. But he then again identifies the awakened state with that of deep sleep, precisely the error that Mehta refers to. Abhishiktānanda says that the *I* of deep sleep [*sushupti*] is the *I* that must be awakened. For the *jīvanmukta*, the *I* that is the see-er [*drashtā*], the witness [*sākshī*], is in the depth of the *I* of deep sleep. The waking *I* is only its shadow [*chāyā*].[112]

Even after his own awakening, Abhishiktānanda interprets his experience in terms of sleep:

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[109] *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, p. 121.

[110] *Diary,* p. 67 (29.3.53).

[111] "La Grâce de l'Inde", *initiation*, p. 44.

[112] *Diary*, p. 353 (29.5.72). Abhishiktānanda cites Kath. Up. III, 1 and VI, 5 in support of this view.

> The Awakening is paradoxically: to awake to what is beyond, and to fall asleep to oneself, to what falls short of it. The Awakening is to enter into a total sleep. But once again, only from this side can we speak of sleep, and equally of Awakening! The Awakening at the level of anyone who has consciousness is precisely to lose oneself, to forget oneself. The Awakening is the shining out of the splendour–in splendour–of the non-awakening of the eternal not-born.[113]

It may be correct to speak of a "total sleep" in reference to trance or to Pure Consciousness. It does not appear correct for the model of the *jīvanmukti*, or the *sahaja* awareness.

2. Yoga and *nirvikalpa samādhi*

Loy argues that yoga is a method to "undo" *savikalpa* perception in order to return to the bare *nirvikalpa* percept.[114] He quotes Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtras*:

> *Dhyāna* is the uninterrupted concentration of thought on its object. This itself turns into *samādhi* when the object alone shines and the thought of meditation [i.e., the thought that "I" am doing it] is lost, as it were.[115]

For Loy, this is an undoing of our superimpositions. But is this an attainment of Pure Consciousness or of Unconstructed Awareness? Loy does not make the distinction. This is due to his idealistic assumption that the superimpositions of our thought not only obscure reality but in fact construct reality. For Loy, the "bare percept" is not a non-differentiation of subject and object, but their non-existence. There is for Loy no nondual totality like Mind-only or *Brahman*, but rather only *śūnyatā* or emptiness. There is therefore no difference for him between the deconstruction of superimpositions and the cessation of consciousness.

In Kashmir *Śaivism* there is a meditation called *śaktopāya* ("the means of energy)"where a person contemplates the real character of one's own person. A *yogin* is to contemplate the pure I-consciousness, as distinct from the limited ego. This sounds quite similar to Ramaṇa idea of Self-enquiry. This type of meditation has been seen as a way to remove superimpositions by way of a dehypnotization:

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[113] *Diary*, p. 388 (12.9.73).

[114] *Nonduality*, p. 44. Thus, despite Patañjali's use of Sānkhya metaphysics in his *Yoga Sūtra*, the stages of *samādhi* (yogic meditation) that he describes may include the nondual.

[115] *Nonduality*, p. 208, *Yoga Sūtra* 1.41.

> …in fact all of us are already moving within the deep rooted hypnotism worked out on us by *māyā*, the deluding power of the absolute reality, and are therefore taking wrongly the mental and physical forms as our real Self. *Śāktopāya* should therefore be taken as such a process of dehypnotization which relives a *yogin* from the hypnotical finitude of his person and limitations in his powers to know and to do in accordance with his will, imposed on him by *māyā*, the most powerful hypnotizing force working in the whole universe.[116]

For Abhishiktānanda, yoga is a psycho-physiological technique, both external and internal at the same time, of leading the spirit to total silence. Yoga is a way to liberate oneself from superimpositions and from mental concepts; one can thereby reduce one's psychic activity to a consciousness of only oneself.[117] He refers to Patañjali and the cessation of mental activity:

> What is essential in yoga is the cessation of mental activities [*vritti nirodha]*, the concentration which finally reaches beyond the *manas*.[118]

This reference to the attainment of total silence, the cessation of mental activity, points towards a view of yoga as an experience of Pure Consciousness.

> True Yoga has only one goal: the complete silence of thought, the arrest, as total as possible, of mental movements. The same must be said, moreover, for the Japanese *za-zen* which, at bottom, is but a deviant form of yoga…[119]

Abhishiktānanda says that Gnānānanda's teaching on meditation is related to Buddhism's teaching of successive purifications of thought.

> We have to leave behind the place of thinking, then that of joy, then that of peace; next, in more advanced meditations, we have to leave behind in their turn all the negations which have acted as supports in leaving behind one stage after another, until we have passed beyond every affirmation and equally every negation, and have entered the total silence, in which one who has reached so far is no longer aware of being silent–since he has passed into the *ākāsha* of the heart, the 'super-space', which can no longer be circumscribed or localized.[120]

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[116] B.N. Pandit: "Śāmbhavopāya: The Divine Way in Kashmir *Śaivism*", *Mysticism in Shaivism and Christianity*, ed. Bettina Bäumer (Abhishiktānanda Society, 1997), p. 219.

[117] "Cheminements Intérieurs", *Intériorеté*, p. 46. "…dégagé de toutes les surimpositions (*adhyāropa*), de l'attribution du non-réel au Réel. Le yogi tâche à se libérer des tourbillons de son imagination et des ses concepts mentaux (*vritti*), à réduire son activité psychique à la seule conscience de Soi-même…"

[118] *Diary*, p. 135 (3.1.56). *Yoga Sūtra* I.1.

[119] Abhishiktānanda: "India's contribution to Christian Prayer" (1971), *Eyes of Light*, p. 41.

[120] *Guru*, p. 67. Gnānānanda used to quote a Tamil verse: "Enter into yourself to the place where there is nothing."

These stages are the same stages that were referred to by Griffiths in his explanation of the idea of Pure Consciousness. Abhishiktānanda therefore believes that yoga leads to Pure Consciousness. Yoga aims at arresting the mental process of ideation, and then at the total disappearance of all images whatever. But this mental "emptiness" or "void" is not sought for itself:

> The void and emptiness of mind aimed at by yoga is not actually wanted for its own sake; otherwise deep sleep would be the highest yogic achievement. Even if void was final it would no longer be the void; it would be *somethin*g: when *nothing* is spoken of, it is no longer nothing. On the physical plane itself, void is always an approximation, a goal which is never reached. The final experience (of pure awareness) is neither void nor non-void and can be thought of only through paradoxes…[121]

He says that the goal of yoga is to awaken and open to higher spheres of consciousness. Once the mind is emptied and the mental processes stopped, the deep power or light—the *śakti* of the Indian tradition–which normally lies hidden and inactive, rises up and shines forth by itself. We then wake up then to what in us is beyond any process of becoming, beyond time, beyond all beginning or end.

The final aim is to discover oneself, that which remains unaffected and non-changing:

> The experience of self-awareness is to be simply conscious of oneself without any qualification whatever; to be aware of simply being, apart from any kind or mode of being, apart from any consciousness of being one who does this or that. Our consciousness is reduced to its central point, as in deep sleep, but at the same time we are as fully aware as in our waking state.[122]

Abhishiktānanda sometimes refers specifically to *kundalini* yoga. He refers to the *cakras* used in meditation. He says that those most recommended for meditation are the heart center (*anahacakra*), the one between the eyebrows (*ajna cakra*) and the top of the head (*sahasra-cakra* or *brahmarandhra*).[123]

Abhishiktānanda believed that the trance of yoga was necessary in order to attain the *advaitic* experience. We must remember that he went to India with this expectation. He had

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[121] Abhishiktānanda: "Yoga and Christian Prayer", *Clergy Monthly* 1971 Vol. 31, no. 11, p. 474.

[122] *Ibid.*, p. 476.

[123] *Ibid.*, p. 473, ft. 1.

read Lacombe's article on Ramaṇa, which spoke of Ramaṇa's *enstasis*. In imitating Ramaṇa's meditation in caves, Abhishiktānanda was also seeking to attain this type of trance experience. It can be argued that the asceticism of monasticism, and the silence of the Carmelites in particular, is an isolation from sensory experience that attempts to seek a Pure Consciousness experience. Because of his expectation, Abhishiktānanda was disappointed when he first met Ramaṇa. Ramaṇa was engaged in ordinary activities like reading a newspaper; he appeared to Abhishiktānanda like his own grandfather. Ramaṇa was obviously not in a trance state.

This conflict between the *enstasy* of meditation and the everyday life of Ramaṇa was resolved for Abhishiktānanda when he met A. Shastri at Arunāchala. Shastri told him that no experience would be possible without the entry into trance produced by the awakening of the *kundalini.*[124] Abhishiktānanda says that the "ashes" of duality that still appeared in Shankara were never there in Ramaṇa, and this is because Ramaṇa first had a trance experience:

> Bhagavan's experience required years of "trance" before his body could be brought back to normal. He went into trance at Arunāchala; a flash occurred like lightning in the presence of the temple *linga*. Even if he had wished, he was incapable of speech, etc. during the early years…[125]

Shastri "reintegrated Patañjali" with reference to Ramaṇa. In other words, Shastri explained how yoga was essential for the *advaitic* experience. But was Shastri's interpretation of Ramaṇa correct? Ramaṇa's own words seem to indicate that yoga is not necessary. The method of Self-Enquiry is a "direct method". *Kundalini yoga* is only preliminary to full Realization.[126] The experience of *kundalini śakti* at the *sahasrāra cakra* at the top of the head is only a temporary realized consciousness. The blaze of light that is experienced is when the mental predispositions have not yet been destroyed.[127]

> If one concentrates on the *sahasrāra* there is no doubt that the ecstasy of *samādhi* ensues. The *vāsanās*, that is the latencies, are not however destroyed. The yogi is there found to wake up from the *samādhi*, because release from bondage has not yet been accomplished. So he passes down from the *sahasrāra* to the heart through what is called the *jivanadi*, which is only a continuation of the s*ushumna*.

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[124] *Diary*, p. 77 (27.11.53).

[125] *Diary*, p. 76 (27.11.53).

[126] *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, p. 358.*

[127] *Ibid.* p. 167.

> The s*ushumna* is thus a curve. It starts from the solar plexus, rises through the spinal cord to the brain and from there bends down and ends in the heart. When the yogi has reached the heart, the *samādhi* becomes permanent. Thus we see that the heart is the final centre.[128]

It is not the experience of the *sahasrāra* that is the key experience, but rather the experience is in the Heart. The path of the energy of *śakti* is up the pathway of the *sushumna* and then down again to the heart. In the Heart the aim is to drain away the *vāsanās*. It is by "diving into the heart" that one searches for the origin of the ego. This is the direct method of self-enquiry (*vichara)* for Self-Realization; you do not have to worry about attaining the *kundalini* experience.[129] The method of Self-inquiry is sufficient. It opens a tiny hole in the Heart, with the result that I-I consciousness shines forth.[130]

In this experience of the Heart, one experiences the true relation between the Self and the body or the mind. One must give up one's mistaken identity with the changeful body or the mind. The body and the mind obtain their existence from the unchanging Self. Ramaṇa compares the relation between the Self and the body or the mind to that of a clear crystal and its background. If the crystal is placed against a red flower, it shines red; if placed against a green leaf it shines green, and so on. When one's mistaken identity is given up, the ever-shining Self will be seen to be the single non-dual Reality.[131]

The emphasis in this experience of the Heart is therefore on seeing the Self or *Brahman* within everything. It is a kind of perception. Seeing *Brahman* means that it has content and is therefore different from Pure Consciousness or the state reached by yoga. Yoga is only preliminary to the real awakening, the experience of the heart.

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[128] *Ibid.* p. 575.

[129] *Ibid.* p. 576. Loy says that Shankara was also of the view that there is no necessity for yogic practice except for those of "inferior intellect." See *Nonduality*, p. 239.

[130] *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, p. 201

[131] *Ibid.* p. 576.

3. *Sahaja samādhi* as a return to the world

Already in *Guhāntara* Abhishiktānanda distinguishes between *nirvikalpa* and *sahaja samādhi*. *Nirvikalpa samādhi* is the *kevala* experience, the experience of the infinite aloneness and solitude of the Infinite, the One-without-a-Second..[132]

In "Sannyāsa", the last major article that Abhishiktānanda wrote, he says that for Ramaṇa the highest form of *samādhi* is *sahaja samādhi*, that which is completely natural ('innate'). He contrasts it with *nirvikalpa samādhi*, which he refers to as "ecstasy".

> In this [*sahaja*] there is no restraint of a man's normal bodily and mental awareness, as in ecstasy (*nirvikalpa samādhi*), which itself implies a dualism; rather the *jñānī* continues to be fully aware of himself and of all around him, but within the indivisible awareness of the *ātman*.[133]

This description by Abhishiktānanda acknowledges that in *sahaja samādhi* there is a content to the experience. One is "fully aware of himself and of all around him." In that state, unlike *nirvikalpa samādhi*, "there is no restraint of a person's normal bodily and mental awareness." Thus, in the terms we have been using, *sahaja* is not an experience of Pure Consciousness. It is an awareness of unity, an "indivisible awareness of *Atman*."

Like Ramaṇa, Abhishiktānanda regarded yoga as preliminary to *sahaja samādhi*. In his book *Saccidānanda* he says that the *sahaja* state is to be contrasted not only with the life of division, complexity and self-delusion when we live (as so often) at the surface of ourselves, but also with the so-called *ecstatic* state when the *sādhaka* is totally absorbed within and has not yet recovered the 'world' in the light of the *ātman.*[134] Abhishiktānanda therefore believed that there must be a recovery of the world after the emptiness of Pure Consciousness. There is a return, an awakening from the awakening.

Abhishiktānanda sometimes expresses the opinion that this further awakening is not found within Hinduism, but only in the Biblical tradition. He says that Indian seers say that those who experience the ultimate experience pass beyond their selves, and do not recover their selves. According to this view, the seer never recovers the self of his external and mundane

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[132] "Jusqu'à la Source, l'expérience de non-daualité", *Initiation*, p. 58.

[133] "Sannyasa", *Further Shore*, p. 11.

[134] *Saccidānanda*p. 40, ft. 3.

identity. But he says that the Biblical view is that Moses came down from the mountain; Paul returned from the third heaven.[135]

He says that a Christian will never come to the Vedāntic experience in the same way as a Hindu does, because the Christian's faith will not allow him to accept the experience as having ultimate value. It is followed by a trinitarian experience of being:

> At the very moment when the ego, the 'I' of the superficial consciousness, is about to be overwhelmed by the essential *aham*, there resounds in the depth of the spirit a triple *Aham*...[136]

In a later chapter, we will look more closely at what Abhishiktānanda means by such a trinitarian experience of being. He means something quite different than an orthodox understanding of the Trinity. For Abhishiktānanda, the importance of the Trinity is the affirmation of both unity and diversity in our experience. For the present, it is important only to note his emphasis that there is a further awakening. The Christian awakes from the *advaitic* awakening:

> When the Christian awakes from the *advaitic* experience and from the apparent sleep in which all consciousness of himself had faded away in the overwhelming awareness of Saccidānanda, he finds himself contemplating Saccidānanda as if from within, and at the same time rediscovers himself and all things. Hitherto he had tried to penetrate the mystery of being, awareness and bliss as from outside, but the mystery withstood him like an adamantine wall. He was caught in a dilemma: either he clung to an impossible dualism, imagining himself as an 'other'; or, when he experienced the incomprehensible but inevitable non-duality, his individual self vanished and was lost in an apparent fusion of identity. This meant that he could only sink into a profound sleep, *suṣupti*, in which he was no longer conscious of anything whatever...[137]

This idea of an awakening beyond the *advaitic* experience is already mentioned in *Guhāntara*. Abhishiktānanda there writes that beyond *advaita* there is a further experience that he calls *ati-advaita*, or *advaitātīta*. In this state one experiences the mystery of the Three in One and the mystery of the One in Three. This is a "trans-*advaitin* mystery of the Father Son and

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[135] *Saccidānanda*, p. 6.

[136] *Saccidānanda*, pp. 197, 198.

[137] *Saccidānanda*, p. 175. The awakening from the slumber of *advaita* was prophesied by the Psalmist: "and I rose up again, for the Lord sustained me." We emerge from nothingness and are reborn as "son of God." *Saccidānanda*, p. 200.

Spirit, the mystery of God in Himself, of the Self of God and of Being which is supra-personal and tri-personal. But Abhishiktānanda also says that to speak of any numbers such as three or one is not possible when we go beyond *advaita.* The sages of India were correct to say neither one nor many, but just to say, not-two, *advaita*, and not-one*, an-eka.*[138]

Abhishiktānanda writes that one must pass through the stage of *advaita* or Unity. *Advaita* is the stage of non-distinction, and of drastic negation, or at least a forgetting of everything that one thought that one "knew" before of God. This *advaita* is also the stage of *kevala*. At the summit of the Christian mystical experience one goes beyond *kevala*.[139] The purpose of *kevala* is purification in order to allow us to enter the Kingdom of God. . Here a person must renounce any distinction from God, at least any distinction conceived on the basis of things in the empirical world. The person who is "flesh" cannot enter the kingdom. There must be a complete surrender or sacrifice, an abandonment to total nothingness. The state of *kevala* is a crucible that burns away all that one is and loves. When this purification is achieved, the Spirit of God attracts the soul even further within. It seems to me that Abhishiktānanda's idea of the purification of *advaita* is very similar to the Western mystical idea of the dark night of the soul.

Abhishiktānanda says that this advance beyond *advaita* is something that India did not know how to discover, and that its *yogis* could not realize. In a remarkable statement, Abhishiktānanda says that they remain on a sort of natural level, and that the least of those in the Kingdom of God is greater than even Ramaṇa.[140]

In the same article, Abhishiktānanda says that when, beyond *advaita*, the mystery of the Trinity is contemplated, the world of distinction, the *an-eka* begins to appear again (*ressurgir*) from the *Śūnyatā* where it had seemed to have disappeared. In the *kevala*, one goes beyond space and time and even beyond eternity and Being, and beyond God as conceived, in order to appear again as from the primordial *yoni*. This appearing again is the resurrection. One passes from Being back again to non-Being, from *kevala* back to *nāmarūpa*. It is the passing from God

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[138] "Dans Le Centre Le Plus Profond", *Guhāntara* (unpublished). See discussion of *aneka* in Chapter X of this thesis.

[139] "Jusqu'à la Source, l'expérience de non-daualité", *Initiation*, p. 63.

[140] "Dans Le Centre Le Plus Profond", *Guhāntara* (unpublished).. The return is also again a *kenosis*. Revelation, or the epiphany in time of the Incarnate Word is nothing other than this mystery of the appearance of being in time.

as the One who is without any second to God as Creator and God as Love, the God of *kenosis.* For the *kenosis* of God is the same as the Love of God.[141]

These ideas are important in explaining Abhishiktānanda's 'non-monistic *advaita*.' The trinitarian awakening breaks through the dilemma of either dualism or monism. There is a rejection of the duality that imagines we are *other* than the rest of the world. There is a return to the world in an experience of communion and unity. The *advaitic* experience shows us the falsity of dualism. This sleep is "a necessary precondition" of our awakening. But we do not stop at the monism of the Pure Consciousness experience; there is an awakening from the awakening. This new awareness is an awareness that "being is essentially 'being-with', communion, *koinōnia*, the free gift of the self and the mutual communication of love."[142] These ideas of communion are also related to Abhishiktānanda's trinitarian view of Being.

Abhishiktānanda says that the Christian who awakes after the *advaitic* night once more finds himself or herself as well as the world, but now at a deeper level. There is a "recovering" of self and the world, and of the reality of time, of becoming, of particularity and multiplicity. The world is full of value and significance, even at the level of its temporality and diversity:

> God–eternal, absolutely self-existent, with all his infinite love, his creative power and his inner tri-personal life–is fully present in the tiniest speck of matter or moment of time in the grain of sand, in the smallest microbe, in the most trivial event in the world or the life of the individual. […] No one has the right to say that God is there only in a diminished or downgraded manifestation of himself, from which the sage must turn away, either by thought (Greek *gnōsis*) or by will (Stoicism) or by 'isolation' or contemplation (Yoga-Vedānta), in order to attain to the Real. No, the Real is precisely there.[143]

This is a clear statement of Abhishiktānanda's view of a nondual perception of the world, a seeing *Brahman* within all things. The *jñāni* does not discover anything new. The *jñāni* just sees reality in all its glory. The *jñān*i penetrates to the essence of things and there discovers

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[141] *Ibid.* Abhishiktānanda quotes the Bengali poet Tagore: Where would your love be if I did not exist?"

[142] *Saccidānanda*, p. 176.

[143] *Saccidānanda*, pp. 128, 129.

Yahweh-*Brahman*, "the One who IS."[144] He or she has recovered the state of communion of the child with the world, and is connected with the entire universe.

This idea of our awakening being related to perceiving a connection with the rest of the cosmos, and of seeing everything as *Brahman* was already expressed as early as 1956:

> There is no awakening to being in the depth of oneself that is not an awakening to being in every being, and in the whole history of the cosmos and of humanity, and in the whole history of each person, and in the whole of one's own history. Yogic introversion is only fruitful on this basis. Only then does it even have a result.[145]

Abhishiktānanda is aware that his ideas of a further awakening and communion reflect Christian ideas. He asks whether we should try to discover in a Christian *advaita* something beyond Vedāntin *advaita*. But he says that as soon as there is a qualification, *advaita* disappears. The *dvandva* [opposites, dualisms] reappear, and we have fallen away from the Real.[146]

Is this idea of a return to be found within Vedānta? How does it compare to Ramaṇa's idea of the *sahaja* experience? The issue is complicated. Like many neo-Vedāntins, Ramaṇa was influenced by Christian ideas. He was educated in a Christian school. He continued to quote from the Bible in later life. He may have incorporated ideas from Christianity that give a more positive appreciation for our relations with the external world.

Abhishiktānanda says that Ramaṇa's own 'return' was only figurative, since he never really returned from the experience.[147] After his experience, Ramaṇa saw nothing but the reality of Being, the Self. Abhishiktānanda compares this to the Christian mystic:

> When the Christian mystic 'returns' from his own experience, he perceives everywhere in the world the signs of the presence of the trinitarian mystery. In every rustling leaf, in every gentle breeze, in every moment and every event either in nature or history, he hears the *Thou* in which Being awakes to itself…[148]

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[144] *Diary*, p. 288 (12.11.66). Cf. Bede Griffiths, who also believed that the advaitic night (where all distinctions, divine mystery, soul and world are gone beyond) is not the ultimate state. Divine Sonship is the first but not the full opening to the Trinitarian Mystery. See Judson B. Trapnell, "Two Models of Christian Dialogue with Hinduism" V*idyajyoti* April 1996, Vol. 60, No. 4, p. 249.

[145] *Diary*, pp. 187, 188 (30.11.56).

[146] *Diary*, p. 266 (22.3.64).

[147] *Saccidānanda*, p. 196. Abhishiktānanda places the word 'return' in quotes because in his view no one who has truly had the *advaitic* experience ever really returns.

[148] *Ibid.*

It is unclear whether this comparison is meant to express an equivalence of experience between Ramaṇa and the Christian mystic. On the previous page, Abhishiktānanda writes, "the Vedāntic experience of the Self leads on to the Trinitarian experience of Saccidānanda."

In his book *The Further Shore*, Abhishiktānanda refers to the *Māṇḍūkya Upanishad* with respect to this issue of return:

> *Ayam ātma brahma* (This *ātman* is *Brahma*), declares the seer of the *Māṇḍūkya Up.* (v.2), when he returns–'if ever he does return'–from his experience. Does this mean then that he might look at it as if from outside? Or is this the last word that he utters in the very moment of being swallowed up in this ultimate experience?[149]

The seer is able to say "*This ātman is Brahman.*" But at what point in time is the seer able to say these words? Abhishiktānanda is of the view that the *advaitic* experience is beyond words. So the words are not used during the experience itself. Are they said after the *return* from the experience? Or are these the last words uttered before being "swallowed up" in the nondual experience? This issue may be resolved if we distinguish a Pure Consciousness experience, where one is "swallowed up", from a *sahaja* experience where one returns to the world and becomes aware of the experience, and consequently of the unity of the world, and the nondifference, *advaita*, of one's self and *Brahman*.

Elsewhere Abhishiktānanda makes this same contrast between the absorption of the *nirvikalpa* experience and the *sahaja* experience. He compares *sahaja* to the return depicted in the Ten Oxherding Pictures of Zen that show the various stages of Zen Enlightenment. The eighth picture in this series is a simple circle representing empty unity. But it is followed by the picture "Returning to the Source." This picture is of a flowering branch representing particularity. Abhishiktānanda says that when we are in the *nirvikalpa* experience of nonduality, there is nothing else other than *Brahman*. Everything flies away, there is no longer room for anything else at all. This *nirvikalpa* experience is in the cave of our heart. But from this cave of the heart,

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[149] *Further Shore*, p. 104.

> …everything comes down again, everything is given back, as in the original state [*sahaja*] on coming out of absorption in what is beyond thought [*nirvikalpa*]. The Ten Pictures of Zen.[150]

In the *sahaja* experience there is a coming out of the "absorption" of the *nirvikalpa* experience.

Loy also refers to the picture of the return in the Ten Oxherding Pictures. He interprets it not as a return from emptiness to fullness, but as a finding of emptiness in the return to the world:

> Emptiness at this stage is found *in* the phenomena of the everyday world. According to Kakuan's commentary, one "observes the waxing and waning of life in the world while abiding unassertively in a state of unshakable serenity. This [waxing and waning] is not a phantom or illusion [but a manifestation of the Source].[151]

If we understand "emptiness" as the inter-relatedness of all things, then this may be a good parallel to the *sahaja* experience, at least as understood by Abhishiktānanda.[152] But Abhishiktānanda emphasizes that although everything is "given back" in the *sahaja* state, everything comes from the "heaven" that is hidden in the heart.

> But everything comes from this heaven. Whatever does not come from (*ex*) this heaven is transitory [*adhruva*] and must pass away. The Church and the Eucharist, with their form, like everything else.[153]

In this passage, Abhishiktānanda emphasizes that the source of the world that we see is unchanging. This relates to a two-tier view of reality. It should be contrasted with Loy's Buddhist view of the "waxing and waning" of particularity; the Buddhist emphasis is on impermanence and contingency, and not of a permanent substratum to our experience.

The verse that accompanies the picture of return in the Oxherding Pictures says of the sage,

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[150] *Diary*, p. 288 (10.11.66).

[151] *Nonduality*, pp. 59, 269.

[152] See J.S. Krüger: *Along Edges*, p. 290. Hua-yen philosophy interprets emptiness as radical relationality. There is a mutual mirroring of all events in all other events.

[153] *Diary*, p. 288 (10.11.66).

> It is as though he were now blind and deaf. Seated in his hut, he hankers not for things outside. Streams meander on of themselves, red flowers naturally bloom red.

Loy says that the phrase "as if blind and deaf" is often used in Ch'an literature to praise the one whose seeing and hearing are completely without any sense of duality. It is sometimes described as no-seeing and no-hearing. Loy says that that is why one master was enlightened in hearing the sound of a pebble striking a bamboo. "He heard the nondual nirvikalpa sound, freed from any thoughts *about* it."[154]

Abhishiktānanda describes the *sannyāsī* as one who is blind, deaf and dumb, who passes through the world like one who does not belong to it at all.[155] If the monk reappears in the world, it is in the manner of one who is not of it anymore, not there any more. The sounds which his ears perceive, the spectacles which his eyes see, do not have the same sense as before; they do not penetrate any more in him to the same centre. He is in the world as a pure manifestation of Self.[156]

What does this mean, that the sounds and sights do not penetrate any more in the sage? This is not to be understood in a monistic sense, where there is nothing to see or hear since there is only Self (as in Ramaṇa's interpretation of the *jīvanmukti*). In my view, what Abhishiktānanda means is that the sage is free from ego in such seeing and hearing. The life of the realized person or *jivanmukta* is one who has returned to ordinary life but without ego. Abhishiktānanda expresses this view as early as 1952:

> One who has attained *satori*, anyone who has been enlightened, continues to see grass as green and the sky as blue, to consider rice as something to eat and cloth as something to wear, and the train as a means of transport. What he is liberated from is the relationship to "himself" that until then he projected onto these things. Things are seen in themselves, and no longer in dependence on "himself." Dear ones are no less loved, but there is no longer the least attachment, the least turning back on "himself".[157]

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[154] *Nonduality*, p. 59.

[155] *Further Shore*, p. 7.

[156] "Cheminements intérieurs", *Intériorité*, p. 57.

[157] *Diary* , p. 50 (19.7.52).

Things are seen in themselves. To use the words of the verse in the Oxherding Pictures, "Streams meander on of themselves, red flowers naturally bloom red."

In 1970, Abhishiktānanda wrote again about how the *jīvanmukta* returns to ordinary life without egotism:

> The general mistake about Vedānta is to picture Vedāntin life as something different, consisting of acts, attitudes, '*feelings*', that would be different from the acts, '*feelings*', attitudes of our so-called ordinary life. Most often people therefore picture an "acosmic" life. Whereas nothing changes or appears outwardly in the life of one who is realized. Jesus eats, drinks, weeps, gets tired. Poonja [Harilal] manages his mines. Janaka [a Hindu king] rules his kingdom. K.'s guru arranges the marriage of his children, etc. The realized person embraces his wife with as much love and joy as anyone else. Only, he is free, does not seek *himself*. The *gunas* [natural "qualities"] take the same pleasure, a pleasure that is even greater because it is pure [*śuddha*], not mixed with egotism, etc. But in everything that is not necessary (wife, *devas*, *pūjā*, etc.), he is free, *līlā* [play]. Even in the necessary things like eating, sleeping, there is no more than the physical need of the *gunas*, not the psychological need which *ahamkāra*, egotism, has added to them.[158]

In this last description, Abhishiktānanda speaks of pure [*śuddha*] qualities. This is reminiscent of the pure intentions and *vāsanās* that Ramaṇa acknowledges continue to exist in the life of the *jīvanmukta*.

Abhishiktānanda says that some people physically die after their *advaitic* experience. But there are also those who return to the world. He regarded his own survival of his near-death experience as such a return. The year before this experience, he had written about the *jīvanmukta* as the person who has come back to his *śarīram* or body once the knots of the heart have been cut. The *jīvanmukta* thereafter lives his or her life against the backdrop of "the unborn"-the permanent Self.[159]

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[158] *Diary*, p. 321 (22.10.70).

[159] *Diary* , p. 356 (11.6.72).

4. Seeing *Brahman* in all things

Abhishiktānanda emphasizes the importance of seeing *Brahman* in all things. Sometimes he refers to this perceived presence as "*Brahman",* sometimes as "God" and sometimes as "Self". At other times, he refers to the *śakti* (the dynamic power of *Brahman*:) in all things:

> There is within us a force, a reality that we do not suspect: *śakti*, spirit. A force that is not different from the self [*ātmanā na vyatiriktah*][160]

At the time of his awakening, Abhishiktānanda affirmed this view of a 'Force' passing through beings.[161] This perception of God is a perception with content; it is not a trance experience of Pure Consciousness.

Abhishiktānanda emphasizes that our perception of God is not just an emotion, something 'felt'. It is more than a sentiment, but an 'ontic' experience:

> An adult faith is based on a real experience of God both in His presence in the depth of the soul and of His presence in the core of all things. We do not speak here, however, of a 'felt' experience, of a so-called sentiment of the divine Presence. We rather refer to what some call an 'ontic' experience, something which springs from the centre of the being and transforms all activities of man, even if he is not directly aware of it.[162]

Brahman Itself is without form and yet it appears in other persons, things and events:

> In order to call me, to see me, to engender in me and cause to spring up my vision of You, You take all forms, *sarvarūpa*, You who are Without-Form, *a-rūpa*, *a-linga*. All of that is when You call me. All of that is only in Your call. It is in the bosom of everything that You cry "You" to me. In the mountain, the river, the forest, the trees growing from the vertical cliff, in each person that I meet, in each event.[163]

Abhishiktānanda cites the *Muṇḍaka Upanishad* in support of this view that *Brahman* is in all things:

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[160] *Diary*, p. 381 (10.5.73).

[161] *Letters*, p. 307 (MC, 21.7.73). The poem referred to is reproduced on page 304 of the *Letters.*

[162] Abhishiktānanda: "The Way of Dialogue" *Inter-Religious Dialogue* ed. Herbert Jai Singh (Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, Bangalore, 1967).

[163] June, 1964 written at Gangotri, cited in Introduction to *Intériorité*, pp. 16, 17. My translation from the French. The idea of different levels of reality underlies this idea of the "call" of *Brahman* in all things. We are called to recognize the higher nature of true reality. This pointing is the "sacramental" side of things.

> He is in every element, in all he is what he is. He is in this universe in the earth, in the heavens, in that which there is between the two. He is in the breath of man, in his senses, in his thought. In him is contained all that which moves, all that which flickers, the worlds and the inhabitants of worlds. He is greater than the greatest, smaller than the smallest, outside the grasp of thought (*Muṇḍaka-Upanishad*).[164]

God is as much in the flight of the insect as in the contemplation of the saint. God as Self is in everything and everywhere, totally and indivisibly. That is why India even includes subhuman incarnations of God; the image (*mūrti*) that is most popular is that of Ganesh.[165] This appearance of *Brahman* in nature, in other people and in events is done "in order to call" one to *Brahman*. All things point to that which is beyond them:

> Every being bears the sign of all; the smallest mite, the grain of sand, the electron are radiant with Brahman…and everything leads to Brahman.[166]

Abhishiktānanda says that everything in the world is sacramental, in pointing to God.[167] There is "nothing in creation that eludes the divine presence" and "everything in it is filled with grace and sacredness."[168] Everything is a manifestation of God, but in its own unique way:

> When once you have reached the heart of the sign, you realize that everything is essentially an epiphany, a manifestation of the Lord. Thereafter what is important are not the differences and disparities between the manifold manifestations, but the quality common to all of them–and to each of them in a unique manner–of being a sign of God. This extends from yourself to every conscious being that has ever existed or will exist, from the atom or the smallest living creature to the galaxies. In everything now the heart has been discovered–the heart in which all is discovered, all is seen, all is known. There is nowhere anything but God in himself.
>
> Only then can the taste of Being be appreciated. And thereafter that taste–that, and no other–is recognized in every being.[169]

Abhishiktānanda does not deny that there are distinctions and unique manifestations of Being. What is important is "the common quality" to them all, that they all have the same

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164 "India and the Carmelite Order" (1964), *Eyes of Light*, p. 85.

165 "Cheminements Intérieurs", *Intériorité*, p. 66.

166 *Diary*, p. 347 (24.4.72).

167 "L' épiphanie de Dieu" (1953), *Intériorité*, p. 111.

168 *Guru*, p. 38.

169 *Guru*, pp. 42, 43.

"taste" of Being. It is more important to recognize that God is present in all things than to try to understand how this is so. This is why the *anjali* greeting can be made, acknowledging God in other people.[170]

Sometimes Abhishiktānanda uses the image of "hearing" instead of "seeing." *Brahman* can be heard in sounds of nature as well as in the silence of the heart.

> The OM which breaks forth from the roar of the Ganges, from the rustling of leaves, from the twittering of the birds and echoes indefinitely across the sheer cliff faces, is the OM which wells up in the pilgrim's heart like an infinite echo repeating itself, increasing and finally merging into the primordial OM in the silence in which all is said.[171]

While Abhishiktānanda was meditating in the caves of Arunāchala, he was bothered by noise from loudspeakers that were set up in the town below. In his *Diary* he writes that even that noise may be perceived as God.[172]

Being able to see this manifestation of God in every being and in every person is much more important than seeking extraordinary visions, or in all those "quasi-revelations" and appearances of Jesus in which so many Christians delight.[173] Seeing God in other people or creatures is in fact the same as prayer:

> To look with eyes enlightened by faith at trees and plans, at fruits and flowers, at birds and animals–all of them created by the Father to help and serve us and to be used by us in our ascent towards him–is also nothing less than prayer and contemplation.[174]

The presence of God in everything leads us to God. But the presence of God is also seen after we become awakened:

> The presence of God will therefore be the first thing which the *jñāni* will see in everything he sees or meets with. It is the first thing also which the ordinary man sees in the saint whose *darshana* he has the grace to obtain.[175]

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[170] *Diary*, p. 38 (8.4.52).

[171] "Mountain of the Lord" in *Guru and Disciple* (London: SPCK, 1974), p. 151.

[172] *Diary*, p. 45 (8.6.52). God is also in the motion of the railway locomotive. "How would the locomotive go forward if the divine Act did not "manifest itself" in it?"

[173] *Letters*, p. 212 (MT, 14.4.69).

[174] *Prayer*, p. 18.

[175] "An Approach to Hindu Spirituality" *Clergy Review* (1969) *LIV NO. 3,* p. 167.

The *jñāni* sees these other beings in the Self. Where the profane only sees vulgar names and forms, where the initiated adores a divine manifestation, the awakened one does not see anything but God.[176] Abhishiktānanda says that the one who has passed *satori* [he uses the Zen Buddhist word] there is nothing anywhere but the Self, in the water that runs, the grass that grows, the clouds that pass, the child who sings, each work of each being. This is where the Divine Generation realises itself.[177] He cites Gnānānanda:

> The same *prāna*, breath of life, permeates all beings. In the same way the *ātman* is everywhere, and everywhere it is uniquely itself. The *jñāni* breathes this "breath", inhaling and exhaling it in each created being. Nowhere is there any difference. Everything is felt by him as "his own".[178]

5. *Anātman* and Self

Sometimes Abhishiktānanda speaks about loss of self in Buddhist terms of *anātman.* The first meditation that Abhishiktānanda was given by Gnānānanda concerned this doctrine. Gnānānanda advised him that the "I" is first perceived in relationship to the world outside, to what is not-myself:

> So long as anyone only knows himself in this fashion, that is, by means of outward things and with reference to them, it cannot be said that he really knows himself. At that stage, what I call "myself" simply consists of the ceaseless reactions, sensory and mental, of that biological and psychological centre which I am, in response to external stimuli. It was on account of this instability that the Buddha would not attribute substantial existence to the person, which according to his terminology he identified with the *ātman*. Whoever wishes to know himself once for all and to arrive at his true being, should aim at reaching his "I" in its unchangeable identity and sovereign freedom.[179]

Gnānānanda here interprets the Buddhist idea of *anātman* as denying only our shifting ego awareness. He insists that one can still reach the true "I", one's unchanging identity. There are some interpretations of Buddhism that see the doctrine of *anātman* in this way. For example, D.T. Suzuki seems to interpret it this way.

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[176] "Ehieh Asher Ehieh" *Intériorité*, p. 86.

[177] "Cheminements intérieur*s" Intériorité*, p. 43.

[178] *Guru*, p. 87.

[179] *Guru*, pp. 77, 78.

> The denial of *Atman* as maintained by earlier Buddhists refers to *Atman* as the relative ego and not to the absolute ego, the ego after enlightenment-experience.[180]

Sometimes the "Mind-only" of Yogācāra Buddhism is interpreted as the true Self. Abhishiktānanda seems to have interpreted it in this way.[181]

Other interpreters of Buddhism reject any view of an absolute ego or True Self. They deny any fixed sense of self, either in a small sense or a larger sense.[182] The true nature of self is non-self, emptiness, *śūnyatā*. Sometimes Abhishiktānanda uses Buddhist expressions to refer to this sense of nonself as emptiness:

> The abyss has too thoroughly engulfed me, the abyss of the Self, the abyss of Emptiness [*Śūnyatā*].[183]

Abhishiktānanda even denies the Hindu doctrine of the sheaths or successive layers of the Self:

> For if it really was the within, it would be the within of some thing, and an absolute within is no longer a within. The final prop on which you were relying in order to discover the supreme secret must be jettisoned in its turn. There is nothing, nothing any more, void, absolute *śūnyatā*. Even the idea of within vanishes when the within is attained. What is the within? "It is." *asti, asti…*
> There is no skin, no pulp and no kernel, no grain within the kernel and no new elements within the grain, these are the successive layers of an onion, each one more flimsy; when you have removed the last one, nothing remains…This nothing is the All.[184]

Abhishiktānanda speaks of the self as a "conglomeration that will dissolve."[185] This seems to be a reference to the Buddhist idea of the self as being composed of *skandhas*. And yet he also says the opposite: that the "I" has identity and is not just a conglomeration of whirling happenings:

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[180] D.T. Suzuki: *Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist* (Harper, 1971), p. 51.

[181] He refers to Mahayana theology that the body is a manifestation of the Self. "Cheminements Intérieurs" *Intériorité*, p. 48.

[182] See the discussion by Steven Collins: *Selfless Persons* (Cambridge, 1982).

[183] *Diary*, p. 68 (29.3.53). See also *Diary*, p. 146 (6.3.56).

[184] *Diary*, p. 81 (6.12.53).

[185] *Diary*, p. 315 (25.7.70).

> My I is not simply an epiphenomenon, a knot made of the plaits of the happenings which constantly whirl around, inside and outside me. The I which I pronounce today is identically the same as the I which I pronounced 10, 20, 60 years ago.[186]

At the time of his awakening, Abhishiktānanda said that he disconnected from all sense of his ego, but he affirmed that his true Self remained:

> And all of that made me discover myself at a level that went so far beyond all sensations. Seeing myself so weak, so incapable of thought and movement, I became free from my identification with that *myself* which previously used to think and will, used to move about and was anxious about all and sundry. Disconnection. All that consciousness with which I usually moved was no longer mine, and yet I myself still continued to be…[187]

In his awakening, Abhishiktānanda does not speak of there being no self, but of discovering his true Self, the Grail. He perceived that his habitual consciousness was gone, but there was a wider consciousness that was not limited by any location.

Thus even if Abhishiktānanda wrote about nonself in Buddhist terms prior to his awakening, it seems clear that after his awakening he affirmed the existence of a Self, and he claimed that he had found that Self. To be without ego is to see the Self in the universe. Abhishiktānanda says that this is the ultimate meaning of *nirmamo nirahamkāra* (without 'mine' nor 'I').[188] This fits with what we have earlier seen about perceiving the Self or *Brahman* in the universe.

While meditating in the caves at Arunāchala, Abhishiktānanda wrote that the primordial duality is between oneself and the world:

> The primordial duality that I must pass beyond is this: myself and everything else, not that between God and "me." As long as there are these "others"–outside myself, God and the world will be jumbled up in them, even though they may be distinguished and defined in a second look. As long as the world remains other [*aliud*] for me, God can never be perceived by me within myself.
> Do away with that "centre" which I call "myself" and round which I draw concentric circles, which are my mind, my body, the world which basically I see in relation to myself, and finally God who, unfortunately, is no less "related" to myself.

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[186] *Abhishiktānanda*: "The Upanishads and the Advaitic Experience", *Clergy Monthly*, Dec., 1974, p. 480.

[187] *Diary*, p. 387 (11.9.73).

[188] "Cheminements intérieurs" *Intériorité*, p.44.

> *Satori* [enlightenment] is attained when I have realized that the centre is as truly everywhere as it is in "myself"(…)
> Feel "myself" in the tree, in the stone, in the rat, […], in the ass, in what is hateful, in what is indifferent, as really as in this body and this mind [*manas*] which I have up to now considered as a centre of supreme interest.[189]

The nondual perception experienced by the enlightened person is therefore a perception that is without any ego centre. It is the seeing of the "essential interdependence" or interrelatedness. This description of loss of self as "centre" is remarkably similar to the Hua-Yen Buddhist view of inter-relatedness, or Indra's Net. This story symbolizes our cosmos as an infinitely repeated interrelationship among all its members. One of the best versions of that story is given by Thich Nhat Hanh:

> If you are a poet, you will see clearly that there is a cloud floating in this sheet of paper. Without a cloud, there will be no rain; without rain, the trees cannot grow, and without trees, we cannot make paper. The cloud is essential for the paper to exist. If the cloud is not here, the sheet of paper cannot be here either…
>
> If you look into this sheet of paper even more deeply, we can see the sunshine in it. If the sunshine is not there, the tree cannot grow. In fact, nothing can grow. Even we cannot grow without sunshine. And so we know that the sunshine is also in this sheet of paper. The paper and the sunshine inter-are. And if we continue to look, we can see the logger who cut the tree and brought it to the mill to be transformed into paper. And we see the wheat. We know that the logger cannot exist without his daily bread, and therefore the wheat that became his bread is also in this sheet of paper. And the logger's father and mother are in it too…
>
> You cannot point out one thing that is not here–time, space, the earth, the rain, the minerals in the soil, the sunshine, the cloud, the river, the heat. Everything co-exists with this sheet of paper…As thin as this sheet of paper is, it contains everything in the universe in it.[190]

If everything is inter-related, then nothing has its own self-contained existence. The centre is everywhere. This is a nondual view of self and the rest of the cosmos.

It must however be acknowledged that Abhishiktānanda is not consistent and that he sometimes sees "Self" in a much more monistic way:

> As long as I distinguish the *within* from myself who seeks the within, I am not within. He who seeks and that which is sought vanish in the last stage, and there

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[189] *Diary*, p. 49 (15.7.52).

[190] Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Heart of Understanding* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1988), pp. 3-5, cited by David Loy: "Indra's Postmodern Net", *Philosophy East and West* (July. 1993), vol. 43 no. 3, p. 482.

> is nothing left but pure light, undivided, self-luminous [*jyoti akhanda svaprakāśa*]. The last work to be done is to cut through the final distinction between *he who seeks* and *that which is sought*. That is the knot of the heart, *hridaya granthi*. And Ramana was right in recommending the annihilation of *the very thought of myself*, which is the source of everything else.[191]

In this quotation there is the idealist and monistic suggestion that everything other than self arises from the thought of self. When this thought is annihilated, there is nothing left but self-luminous *Brahman*. This is very different than the previous idea of perception of the world without ego. The experience of self-luminous *Brahman* is *nirvikalpa* experience, without any content to the experience. The superficial ego is to disappear in favour of the *ātman*. This is not seen in connection with a return to the world and a connection with the world.

There are therefore several views of the Self to be found in Abhishiktānanda: a monistic Self related to *nirvikalpa* experience, the idea of non-self and *śūnyatā*, and the view of Self as "part" of an inter-related and interconnected whole, as experienced in *sahaja*. I believe that it is this last view which is most consistent with Abhishiktānanda's thought as a whole.

6. Affirmation of the world of "objects" and distinctions

In his earlier writings, Abhishiktānanda says that for the sage there is no longer any distinction between objects. For example, in 1953, he writes,

> For the Sage, difference no longer exists; he is not even one who sees the unity beneath the difference, he "is not aware" of difference itself. Do we not say that God does not know evil? He neither loves nor hates, neither desires nor fears. His peace [*śānti*] and his *ānanda* have a transcendence that goes beyond all human conceiving [*exsuperans omnem sensum*] …The Self is manifest in all creatures and all circumstances.[192]

In these early writings, Abhishiktānanda seems to regard the *advaitic* experience as an experience of Pure Consciousness. The awareness of unity, of seeing *Brahman* in all things, is wholly absent here. He says that the sage "is not even one who sees the unity beneath the difference."

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[191] *Diary*, p. 146 (6.3.56).

[192] *Diary*, p.74 (27.9.53). See also "Ehieh Asher Ehieh", *Intériorité*: p. 97. The sage does not see differences (*bheda*) anymore. The sage is incapable of seeing other than the within.

And yet, as we have seen, there are many passages where Abhishiktānanda writes about seeing *Brahman* in the world–an experience that does not fit with Pure Consciousness. And there are passages where he specifically affirms the continuance of distinctions between things. He says that in the *advaitic* experience there is a "witnessing", a perceiving of beings *beyond* the distinction myself/not myself:

> The I as witness…simply TO BE, without reflecting on the subject as be-ing. Perceive beings beyond the distinction between myself/not-myself, but do not deny this distinction by means of an idea.[193]

Nondual perception is "going beyond" the distinction of myself/not-myself. It is not a denial of such distinction. Abhishiktānanda continued to regard distinctions as real. In experience, the duality of object and subject is *transcended*.[194] To transcend the distinction does not necessarily mean to deny that it exists. The *advaitic* experience is not following up one idea by another idea. "It is not a question of trying to persuade oneself that no differences exist."[195] That would be to deny our experience in the name of logic. Elsewhere, Abhishiktānanda criticizes those followers of Shankara who by their rigid application of concepts deny the reality of the world. The same criticism can be made against Nāgārjuna's dialectic, which denies both subject and object.

T.R.V. Murti distinguishes between Vedāntic and Mādhyamika logic. Mādhyamika considers both terms of a relational complex to be false. For example, if there is no cause without effect and no effect without cause. The cause and effect are neither identical with nor different from each other, nor both, nor neither. Therefore, both terms are unreal. In contrast to this, Vedāntic logic does not reject both the terms as relative. Vedānta can accept one as the reality or the basis of the other.[196]

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[193] *Diary*, p. 312 (16.4.69). As will be discussed, in this quotation Abhishiktānanda shows he does not accept nonduality in Loy's first sense. The perception in the nondual experience is beyond the distinction of myself/not-myself. But Abhishiktānanda does not deny the distinction.

[194] "Notes de théologie trinitaire", *Intériorité*, p. 237. He says that Hindu and Buddhist thinkers know how to juggle ideas as well as western thinkers, but that what counts is the experience.

[195] *Guru*, p. 80.

[196] "The Two Definitions of Brahman in the Advaita", *Studies in Indian Thought: The Collected Papers of Professor T.P.V. Murti* ed. Harold Coward (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1983), pp. 81, 82.

For Abhishiktānanda, distinctions remain, but there is a realization of the *non-separation* of subject and object. Abhishiktānanda refers to the

> Freshness of the simple gaze that forgets it is gazing: it is a seeing without a see-er [*a-drishtri*], the non-separation [*bheda*] of the one who sees [*drashtā*], the seeing [*drishtī*] and the object seen [*drishtam*].[197]

What is overcome is the sense of a separate sense of self, or the ego, as well as the sense of objects that exist in themselves. Both are interrelated. And inter-relation does not mean the same as non-existence. The things we see, including our body, are inter-related. We see this unity when we see the world as it really is.

This is similar to some early interpretations of Ramaṇa's experience. Swami Siddeswarānanda says that going beyond the ego does not mean that one is dead to all sensibility. A realized person is not just content to deny false ideas of reality; the positive element is most important, and that is to know the place of the ego with respect to the totality. He cites the *Panchadashī* ch. 6:13:

> The destruction of the world and of *jīva* does not mean that they must become non-perceptible for the senses, but that a real determination of their real nature must appear. If that were not the case, people could find emancipation without making any personal effort, like sleep without dreams or like a loss of consciousness (*l'évanouissement*) where all perception disappears completely.[198]

Thus, for Swami Siddeswarānanda, *sahaja samādhi*, even for Ramaṇa, is seeing the true nature of the world. It is not a case of cessation of consciousness, or of Pure Consciousness.

Heidegger also speaks of seeing of the true nature of the world. As J.L. Mehta describes it, it is

> …a seeing, not as an act directed toward objective being, either in the Greek sense of *theoria* or in the modern subjectivistic sense, but as the shining forth of the *Sache* itself.[199]

It is tempting to try to discern a development in Abhishiktānanda's writings, from a view of *advaita* as Pure Consciousness to one of perceiving the true nature of reality in *sahaja*

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[197] *Diary*, p. 312, (17.4.69).

[198] *Études sur Ramana Maharshi*, ed. Jean Herbert (Dervy-Livres, 1972), p. 183. The translation is my own.

[199] J.L. Mehta: "Heidegger and Vedanta", *India and the West,* p. 254. A further comparison to Heidegger will be made in the next chapter of this thesis.

awareness. Over time, Abhishiktānanda seems to place more importance on the nature of the experience of the *jīvanmukta*. And there seems to be an increasing rejection of the idea of *māyā* as illusion. But Abhishiktānanda is not always consistent. As late as 1972 he refers to experiences where perception ceases:

> That purusha of glory [*tejas*] is to be found. I am he! [*so'ham asmi*]. When the *tejas* is too strong, even the awakening, even sight disappears–how much more attentiveness to things! […]It is deep sleep [*sushupti*], or else it is death–or else the cutting of the knots of the heart the great death. It is the reaching of the sun, in the *sahasrāra* […] It is being carried off to the place of the self…[200]

It is probably fair to say that Abhishiktānanda alternates between viewing *advaita* as an acosmic experience of Pure Consciousness and viewing it in terms of the *sahaja* awareness of a *jīvanmukta*. What is crucial for our discussion is that when Abhishiktānanda had his own *advaitic* experience, it was not an experience of Pure Consciousness, but rather one of connectedness with reality. Abhishiktānanda's near death experience at the time of his *advaitic* realization shows that distinctions continued to exist for him in the experience. In his experience, he was aware of the smallness of his body, from head to foot.[201] And there was also an awareness of a sense of self infinitely larger than the ego. That suggests that there was still an awareness of objects.

Loy does not discuss whether near-death experiences are nondual. This is perhaps not surprising in view of the fact that near-death experiences are often reported as involving views of one's body from a distance or a height. In Loy's view of nonduality, there could be no such "object" seen. Yet Ramaṇa regarded his near-death experience as nondual. Abhishiktānanda also regarded his near-death experience as nondual.

In the previous chapter, I raised the question whether Abhishiktānanda's awakening changed his views. He writes that the experience has nothing to do with confronting exceptional situations of cold, solitude, or nakedness. It is simply opening your eyes there where you are![202] In other words, it is not a matter of asceticism but of seeing clearly. It is therefore possible that

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[200] *Diary*, p. 355 (10.6.72).

[201] *Diary*, p. 386 (11.9.73).

[202] L*etters*, p. 307 (MC, 21.7.73).

Abhishiktānanda moved from an acosmic, Pure Consciousness view of the *advaitic* experience to one that emphasized the *sahaja* of the *jivanmukta*. Unfortunately, he did not live long enough for this to be clarified.

VI. Nondual Thinking

A. What is dualistic thinking?

We have said that nondual perception is a perception of the world as it is *without thought*. This statement now needs to be clarified. Is all thought to be avoided? Or is it only one type of thought (conceptual thought) that is to be avoided? Is there a nonconceptual thinking, and if so, what would it look like? Would it still be "thinking"? And how does it relate to Abhishiktānanda's *advaitic* experience?

Loy says there are many meanings of 'nondualism.' The first sense that he gives of it is the negation of dualistic thinking. This sense of nondualism is a basic principle of his whole book.[1] Dualistic thinking differentiates that which is thought about into two opposed categories. For example, we distinguish between being and non-being. We make these distinctions in order to then choose one or the other of them, but in fact we cannot take one half without the other. Both halves of the distinction are interdependent; in affirming one half of the duality, we maintain the other as well. Loy cites the Buddhist Madhyāmika thinker Nāgārjuna in support of this criticism of dualistic thinking.[2] For Nāgārjuna, all distinctions are seen as dualisms to be overcome.[3]

But is a distinction the same as a dualism? In my opinion, Loy too easily assumes that they are the same. To say that nonduality overcomes all distinctions is to prejudge the issue of unity and diversity. Abhishiktānanda wants to affirm both unity and diversity. But he also affirms a nondualism. It therefore seems to me that he does not reject all distinctions. That is what he means by a non-monistic *advaita*.

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[1] *Nonduality*, p. 194.

[2] Loy also refers to Derrida's critique of dualities or "différance". He attempts to distinguish Nāgārjuna's critique of dualities from Derrida's critique. Loy says that Nāgārjuna is religious, whereas Derrida is caught in a "bad infinity" of words referring only to other words. See *Nonduality*, pp. 248-260, and "Dead Words, Living Words, and Healing Words", *Healing Deconstruction: Postmodern Thought in Buddhism and Christianity* (Scholars Press, 1996), pp. 33-51. Whether Loy is successful in showing a difference between these two critiques of duality is open to question.

[3] This critique of dualities, insofar as it suggests that there is a "right" kind of thinking that ignores dualities, is self-negating. This type of critique therefore tends towards self-negation and paradox (*Nonduality*, p. 19).

In a dualism (for example, between mind and matter) there is no connection or relation between the two terms. Abhishiktānanda is opposed to such dualisms. But it is different when there is a relation between two terms. The two terms may be points along a continuous spectrum (as in Wilber's idea of a "Spectrum of Consciousness"). Or one term may derive from the other (as in emanation theories of the cosmos). Or the terms may be complementary. There is then a distinction, but not a duality.

For Abhishiktānanda, *advaita* is more than a negative overcoming of dualities. It has meaning only in the underlying experience. In a letter to Chaduc, he writes:

> I am always frightened of people stopping at the 'negative aspect' of my message (no institutions, etc.), whereas all negations–liberations–only have meaning in this break-through to the depth of the I.[4]

Abhishiktānanda's experience must therefore be distinguished from those methodologies that are merely a negative overcoming of dualities. What is important is the experience beyond the dualities of thought.

It is helpful to compare this idea with Krüger's criticism of Derrida. Krüger criticizes Derrida's viewpoint as being only "words about words." But there is a larger context to the words. What we express in language is only part of a larger whole:

> Our linguistic texts are not absolute, but are woven into a larger textile of which we sense that we are part, but which we cannot oversee.[5]

For Abhishiktānanda, overcoming dualism does not mean the denial of distinctions in our thought. We can achieve an awareness of being, *beyond* the distinction between self and not-self. But the distinction is not denied:

> The I as witness…simply TO BE, without reflecting on the subject as be-ing. Perceive beings beyond the distinction between myself/not-myself, but do not deny this distinction by means of an idea.[6]

To deny the distinction between myself and not-myself by means of an idea is an over-reliance on logic and ideas.

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[4] *Letters*, p. 316 (MC 20/21.10.73).

[5] J.S. Krüger: *Along Edges*, p. 29.

[6] *Diary*, p. 312, (16.4.69).

And yet Abhishiktānanda is not consistent. Sometimes he does deny all distinctions. For example, he says that the sage does not see the differences [*bheda*] any more. In everything the sage has seen the unique depth, inherent in everything.[7] The experience is absolutely unformulable because no one remains to formulate it.[8]

We may attempt to reconcile Abhishiktānanda's statements by the distinction between Pure Consciousness, in which there is no awareness of anything, and the *sahaja* awareness in which our perception is beyond the distinction between self and not-self. In *sahaja* we do not deny the reality of the world, but rather we see *Brahman* in everything. Thus when Abhishiktānanda denies that the sage sees any distinctions, this is the Pure Consciousness awareness.

In the *sahaja* awareness, there are distinctions, but they are not related to a separate ego; there is rather a sense of inter-relatedness. The thinking that remains is "nondual."

In order to understand such nondual thinking, we need to look at how Abhishiktānanda views the relationship between thought and experience, what he considers to be dualistic in our thought, and whether he proposes any way to think without dualisms.

B. Concept and Experience in Abhishiktānanda

1. Experience is both prior to and beyond concepts

For Abhishiktānanda, the fundamental experience is both prior to and beyond concepts. He says that Jesus appeared in the world not to teach ideas but to share an experience, that of being the Son of God. This experience is at the same time anterior to and beyond every expression of the experience.[9]

Abhishiktānanda's scheme for relating experience and thought looks like this: our intuition leads to archetypes which lead to myths which in turn lead to concepts, ethical laws and rituals. Our fundamental experience is given to us in our pre-archetypal intuition. This

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[7] "Ehieh Asher Ehieh", *Intériorité*, p. 97.

[8] "Théologoumenon Upasana (méditation) sur la Trinité", *Intériorité*, p. 232.

[9] "Archétypes religieux, expérience du soi et théologie chrétienne", *Intériorité*, p. 188.

fundamental experience is prior to all *expression* of this experience. The first expression of our experience is given to us in archetypes, particularly religious archetypes. These religious archetypes (e.g. Light, Holiness) subsequently find expression in myths, then in concepts, ethical laws and ritual formulas.[10]

Our concepts therefore depend on underlying myths, archetypes and intuitions. There is a fundamental experience (*anubhava*) of being and of Self that is prior to all mental and conceptual particularization; it is innate.[11] Our concepts are a superimposition on that experience.

In *advaita* we seek to go beyond our concepts to recover the fundamental experience. This experience is given in the *nirvikalpa* experience, or the experience of Pure Consciousness. All conceptualization of the experience comes after the experience. We do not even have any concept of God during the experience:

> Not that we then feel ourselves face to face with God…not that we there feel ourselves God…All conceptualization will come later and will bear the mark of various categories–mental, ethical, hereditary and acquired.[12]

In the *advaitic* experience all limitations of words and concepts, of space and time, are wholly transcended.[13] Our later descriptions of the experience can only point to the experience. The one who has had the experience can only "stammer words" about it:

> Of course I can stammer a few words. But that will never be more than some concepts, strictly dependent on my cultural, social, religious and mental environment, on all the previous development of my thought and my consciousness.[14]

The experience is based not on concepts, but on a contact with Reality in itself that cannot be conceptualized.[15] The knowledge can only be communicated by a "faith" in this Reality beyond words:

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[10] *Ibid*. pp. 177, 178, 183.

[11] *Ibid.* pp. 187, 188.

[12] *Diary*, p. 52 (24.7.52).

[13] *Saccidānanda*, p. 11.

[14] *Diary*, p. 371 (2.2.73).

[15] *Diary*, p. 132 (27.12.55).

> I know, but I can only communicate this knowledge to faith [*śraddhā*]; Jesus could do no more: "O men of little faith![16]

The experience of Jesus was also beyond conceptualization, even for himself![17] The teacher teaches no notions, but just awakens the disciple to what he or she already knows, although deepening it.[18]

Even the scriptures can only point to the experience.

> What is important in the Upanishads are the 'correlations' which go beyond all the words employed and pierce the living flesh like electric shocks [*comme des flash?*]. Neither books nor lectures can convey this experience. You have to awake to another level of awareness. […] I now *know* that the Upanishad is true, *satyam*.[19]

The experience is attained by a "leap" from the conceptual to what is beyond the conceptual. It is jumping beyond what is most inward in oneself.[20] Words can help us in the leap. He compares these words, or *theologoumena* to the clock waking the sleeper. The sound of the clock wakes the sleeper but is not the cause of the taking of consciousness in which the person who awakes finds himself immediately. Words are like the termites on the bow of Vishnu. They bite the bowstring and provoke the arrow to fly without being the cause except indirectly.[21]

2. Intuition

For Abhishiktānanda, intuition is a way of knowing that is prior to all conceptualization. This intuition is pre-archetypal, and not itself discoverable or expressible. It is before all

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[16] *Diary*, p. 349 (11.5.72).

[17] "An Approach to Hindu Spirituality", *Clergy Review*, (1969), Vol. LIV, No. 3 p. 173.

[18] *Diary*, p. 333 (11.12.71).

[19] *Letters*, p. 268 (OB 28.5.72). See "The Upanishads, an Introduction", *Further Shore*, pp. 83ff for the idea of correspondences.

[20] *Diary*, p. 257 (5.5.63).

[21] "Expérience spirituelle (*anubhava*) et dogmes", *Intériorité*, p. 211 (Gyansu 28.12.70 to 2.4.71).

expression. It is an innate and fundamental experience of being and of Self.[22] This intuition of ourselves is our first reality; it exists *before* any analysis of ourselves.[23]

Intuition is also what leads us to go *beyond* the conceptual. Our awakening may be *preceded* by concepts, but it is ultimately due to our intuition. The emergence of this "knowledge" of the awakening "will always be by an intuition, a flash of light, an awakening at one and the same moment to oneself and to things."[24] These intuitions, these "flashes of light", which at their source defy expression, are transformed by mental reflection into abstractions and ideas. Ideas, concepts, abstractions, reflections are never anything more than means of returning once more to the original intuition. That original intuition is the hidden norm to which abstraction and ideas must be continually referred, rather than to any reasoning. Intuition infinitely transcends reasoning.[25]

Loy distinguishes between *vijñana* (our knowledge in the dualistic world where we discriminate one thing from another) and *prajña* (wisdom, knowing with no distinction). *Prajña* is the intuitive knowledge that underlies *vijñana*.[26] In other words, our discriminating, conceptual knowledge is always based on intuition.

It is unclear where Abhishiktānanda first obtained this idea of intuition. It is of course possible that he independently developed the idea of a knowledge that transcends reasoning. It is possible that he relied on Shankara, who gives a prominent place to intuition among the *pramāṇas*. However, as we shall see, Shankara limited the application of the *pramāṇas* to the empirical world, world, and relied on Vedic revelation for knowledge of *Brahman*. Abhishiktānanda's view of intuition is therefore broader than Shankara's. A very likely source for Abhishiktānanda's idea of intuition is Rudolf Otto's *Mysticism East and West*, which

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[22] "Archétypes religieux, expérience du soi et théologie chrétienne", *Intériorité*, pp. 183, 187, 188.

[23] *Diary*, p. 345 (24.4.72).

[24] "The Upanishads, an Introduction", *Further Shore*, p. 97.

[25] "The Upanishads, an Introduction", *Further Shore*, p. 65. Cf. Kidd, *Experiential Method: Qualitative Research in the Humanities using Metaphysics and Phenomenology* (New York: Peter Lang, 1990), p. 9: The reflective function of consciousness is a "cognitive re-turning toward meaning which recuperates what was already –there, already experienced." It is the "re-living of an already-existing understanding of self and world."

[26] *Nonduality*, p. 136. At p. 162, Loy compares this to Boehme's distinction between *Vernunft* and *Verstand*, and the distinction between *ratio* and *intellectio* in Plotinus, Eckhart, and Nicolas of Cusa.

Abhishiktānanda sometimes refers to. Monchanin is also a possible source; he writes of the Bergsonian intuition as the effort of sympathy to penetrate to the heart itself of things and beings, like a coincidence in the moment of subject and object. He compares this to Spinoza's idea of a vision *sub specie aeternis*, a vision in the instant of the eternal.[27]

Monchanin was troubled by any appeal to an intuition that is higher than logic. He criticizes Aurobindo's reliance on intuition. Aurobindo has the problem of distinguishing true from false intuition; he does not retain the "verificatory role of logic." Aurobindo appeals to a higher intuition (the "Supermind") to correct our lower intuition. Aurobindo says that this higher intuition is indescribable to one who has not had the experience.[28] Abhishiktānanda had a similar idea of the incommunicability of the experience, and refers to Aurobindo.[29]

Another possible source for Abhishiktānanda's idea of intuition is D.T. Suzuki. Abhishiktānanda read some of his works. Suzuki's interpretation of Zen and of enlightenment relies very much on an intuition to which we return, in order to see things as they really are.

3. Superimposition and *Nāmarūpa*

The idea of going beyond our superimpositions is crucial to Abhishiktānanda's understanding of his *advaitic* experience. He relates the idea of superimposition (*adhyāsa*) to the idea of *nāmarūpa* (names and forms). All our thought is *nāmarūpa,* a knot that binds, a superimposition.[30] The thoughts [*citta vikalpa*] of the mind [*manas*] are superimpositions [*adhyāsa*] on the natural state (*sahaja*).[31] These "knots of the heart" are

> …the sense of identification of the unlimited self with what is limited, the superimposition on the self of the *nāmarūpas* which bind man, who is by nature free, to a particular *loka*.[32]

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[27] *Jules Monchanin: Mystique de l'Inde, mystère chrétien*, ed. Suzanne Siauve (Paris: Fayard, 1974), p. 303.

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 307.

[29] For example, Abhishiktānanda refers to the descent of the "supra-mental". *Diary*, p. 145 (21.1.56).

[30] *Diary*, p. 352 (28.5.72).

[31] *Diary*, p. 378 (20.4.73).

[32] "The Upanishads: An Introduction", *Further Shore*, p. 80, ft. 82. His reference to the superimposition *on* the Self shows that in his view there is a reality that is unconstructed.

In order to be liberated, we need to cut these "knots of the heart" which bind us.[33] Cutting the knots of the heart means going beyond ideas:

> When what is beyond ideas has been discovered (…) then *Mundaka* 2.2.8, "all knots are cut, all doubts blown away, all action (of the mind) is ended."[34]

Ramaṇa, held that the state of illumination or awakening is our natural state. We need only awaken to this natural state. There are knots of ignorance that need to be loosed.[35] The most important knot to be cut is that idea of the separateness of our selfhood:

> The last work to be done is to cut through the final distinction between *he who seeks* and *that which is sought*. That is the knot of the heart, *hridaya granthi.* And Ramana was right in recommending the annihilation of *the very thought of myself*, which is the source of everything else.[36]

C. Myth and Symbol

1. The nature of myth

For Abhishiktānanda, myth and symbols develop out of archetypes.[37] Our subconscious is released in these symbols.[38] We are always in need of some myth or other in order to release these symbols that would otherwise remain buried deep down in our psyche.[39] Even in the sleeping state, the 'I' manifests itself when the unconscious projects itself in symbols[40]

Our myths are great collective dreams.[41] Religions are grandiose dreamworlds and the only mistake is to want to absolutize each symbol.[42] The formulations of the myth vary because

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[33] *Letters*, p. 195 (TL, 17.10.67). The reference here is to the Mundaka Upanishad. Abhishiktānanda refers to these knots of the heart as our hereditary and environmental conditioning. Preface, *Guru* p. ix.

[34] *Letters*, p. 226 (RV, 27.2.70).

[35] *Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, pp. 156, 172 (translation of Vivekacūḍāmaṇi).

[36] *Diary*, p. 146 (6.3.56).

[37] See the discussion of Abhishiktānanda use of the idea of archetypes in the Appendix of this thesis.

[38] *Diary*, p. 184 (29.11.56). In meditation we go beyond not only the senses but also these symbols that emanate from the subconscious.

[39] *Secret*, p. 50.

[40] *Diary*, p. 353 (29.5.72).

[41] *Diary*, p. 368 (2.2.73).

[42] *Letters*, p. 285 (MC, 30.1.73).

they are conditioned by different linguistic and cultural environments, but Abhishiktānanda nevertheless says that "basically they are the same."[43] Each myth is a different approach to the same mystery:

> All these [religions] are different approaches of the *mind* to the mystery that is impenetrable to the *mind*. Truth is beyond, non-dual, ultimate, transcendently real [*advaita paramārthatā*].[44]

Specific faiths such as Hinduism, Judaism, Islam and Christianity have the force of all that flows into the experience from the subliminal level, such as archetypes and myths. We should try to understand these different myths as such and not try to translate it into concepts.[45]

An example of a symbol is the androgyne [as in *Shiva*]. Abhishiktānanda says that this is only a symbol of a mystery of I-Thou which cannot be expressed on the basis of our present concepts. Fundamentally the symbol expresses a reality that is neither one half 'I' and one half 'Thou', nor an 'I' plus 'Thou', nor 'I □ Thou', nor an 'I ≠ Thou', but something indefinable, transpersonal.[46]

Abhishiktānanda says that our reason (*logos*) tries to organize our myths, but this organization of myth is only one of several stages or levels of experience on the way to Spirit.[47] Myth is the first stage. In this stage, humans find themselves as lost; they distinguish themselves poorly from the human, biological and cosmological totality in which they are plunged. This stage is like the indistinct consciousness of the child.

The second stage is the *logos,* which tries to organize this mythic mass. We try to limit the field of archetypes, and we oppose one to the other. But myths tend to get absolutized in this way, especially when myth turns into concept.

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[43] *Abhishiktānanda*: "The Upanishads and the advaitic Experience", *Clergy Monthly*, Dec., 1974, p. 478.

[44] *Diary*, p. 95 (2.7.54).

[45] *Diary*, pp. 289, 290 (23.11.66).

[46] *Diary*, p. 153, (28.7.56).

[47] "Archétypes religieux, expérience du soi et théologie chrétienne", *Intériorité*, p. 203 ff. Abhishiktānanda refers to Panikkar for these three stages.

The third stage is that of the Spirit. All acquisitions of *logos* are preserved, but we go beyond them. There is a plurality of concepts, myths, and archetypes, but their surface limitations and oppositions are surpassed.

2. The relativity of myth

In Abhishiktānanda's view, to say that something is symbol or myth does not mean it is not true.[48] But because each myth is only one approach to the same mystery, myths are relativized.[49] The truths of the Church are true, but only at a relative level.

> Everything is true in the Church, at the level of symbol, but that is only the level of *māyā*.[50]

In the *advaitic* experience mythical and conceptual symbols are left behind:

> The faith, its obligations, and its rites retain their truth value at *one level*, but for those who are no longer at that level, what truth do they still have?[51]

Abhishiktānanda says that the truth of the symbol must not be confined to sign.[52] When the attention of the believer is focused solely on the sign, it loses its diaphanous quality and becomes a screen, and leads to idolatry, which is the cult of the image for the sake of the image itself, the idea for the sake of the idea itself.[53] We should accept the symbolic truth of every formulation, every rite, but obstinately refuse to give them an absolute value.[54] The sign must point beyond itself to the experience. To see the sign only as sign, and not as symbol pointing beyond itself, is idolatry.

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[48] *Diary*, p. 314 (3.7.70).

[49] Myths are relativized only because **we can experience the reality of Being to which different myths refer. This experience of Being has priority over what we say about it in our myths and concepts; ontology is prior to and the basis for epistemology. Abhishiktānanda's** statement of the relativity of myths and concepts is not itself a conceptual statement that in turn can be relativized; it is rather a limiting idea, an acknowledgement of the limitation of our theoretical and mythical thought in comparison to the certain knowledge of the experience of the "I Am."

[50] *Diary*. p. 120.

[51] *Diary*, p. 120 (30.8.55). Cf. Krüger: *Along Edges*, p. 133. "At its ultimate, the symbols, the socially constructed sacred stories (myths), concepts and theories, the very act of thinking are often reported to have been left behind."

[52] Krüger says that signs are fixed, unambiguous, fully known. He contrasts signs with symbols that are polysemic, indefinite, half-known. A*long Edges*, p. 71.

[53] "Archetypes religieux, expérience du soi et théologie chrétienne", (1970) *Intériorité*, p. 189.

[54] *Diary*, p. 369 (2.2.73).

> For all that one says, read, writes and thinks about God is far from God…idols (…) The simple man carves a piece of wood and bows down before it (…) The intelligent man forms a concept and does the same. He thinks he has 'arrived', because he has made a god on his own scale![55]

Abhishiktānanda says that Christianity has no ultimate superiority to other myths. It, too, is only one approach, or one "view" of the advaitic mystery.[56] Its myths of the Church and of Christ must also be left behind when we awaken.[57] The uniqueness of Christ is part of the Christian symbol. So too are the doctrines of eternal generation, the descent into time, the resurrection, ascension, the coming of the Spirit.[58] The history of salvation has its conceptual, mythical and sociological form only for one who is not awakened.[59]

It took Abhishiktānanda some time to come to the conclusion that all religions, including Christianity, must be transcended:

> After having wrestled with the Angel for years, I am forced to accept that in practice, de facto, the whole so-called Christian approach to the 'mystery' is just one of the approaches! A brilliant and sparkling *līlā* [game] of 'the One who sports among the worlds', the reflection in a given mirror of the *Satyam* [Real] who simply IS.[60]

Panikkar influenced Abhishiktānanda in this conclusion. He had read Panikkar's essay on the "Supername', and he described this essay as

> …an attempt to lead Christians as gently as possible to accept that in losing their *nāmarūpa* they still keep everything!…we have to accept that it is all *nāmarūpa*—and to begin with, the idea of *Salvation*. In the final pages you admit this yourself: 'salvation;' means nothing–nothing real–to the humanist, any more than to the Buddhist or the Vedantin![61]

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[55] Cited in *Letters*, p. 62 (March, 1953).

[56] *Diary*, p. 149 (11.4.56).

[57] *Diary*, p. 373 (17.2.73). Contrast Bede Griffiths who succeeded Abhishiktānanda at Shantivanam. In his view, Christ and Church remain "real symbols" of the divine.

[58] *Diary,* p. 314 (July, 1970).

[59] *Diary* p. 319 (14.9.70).

[60] *Letters*, p. 282 (RP 23.12.72). *Diary*, p. 322 (18.11.70). "The expression of the experience [*anubhava*] in the mind [*manas*] of Ramana Maharshi is certainly incompatible with the Christian faith. It follows that the Christian faith –with its variations–is only one expression among others of the *anubhava.*"

[61] *Letters*, p. 286 (RP, 30.1.73).

According to Abhishiktānanda, religions create barriers. Only a theology founded on the experience of the Self will be capable of breaking the barriers that close off the religious systems that are founded on myth and concepts.[62] The words and concepts themselves are relative:

> So we should accept *nāmarūpa* of the most varied kinds. And play the game with them in the same manner as the Lord does with the worlds.[…] we should penetrate to the depth of each one's mystery, and accept the relativity of all formulations.[63]

3. The necessity of myth

As in the case of archetypes, myths are relative but indispensable.

> But let me never forget that in reformulating the mystery of Christ and of the church I am putting another mythical framework in the place and instead of the one that I remove, for without an underlying myth, I cannot even think. […] Not to repeat Bultmann's mistake, who remythologizes as much as he demythologizes.[64]

Abhishiktānanda recognized that his own words had the function of myth. Even to speak of *advaita* is mythological language:

> "The truth of the simultaneous *advaita-aneka* [not-two, not-one], discovered in the *nun* [now] of the Present. The immense *mythos* of saying that.[65]

He says that Vedānta also has its myths. "Self-realization" is the great myth of the Vedanta. Abhishiktānanda refers to Ramaṇa's admonition that the final obstacle to realization is the very idea that one ought to strive after it.[66]

Although he recognized his own remythologizing, Abhishiktānanda also justified it. He says that scholars often just abstract a rationalized skeleton from the myth. Only a true mystic who has penetrated to the depth of the myth can express it in other words for the people of his or her time.[67]

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[62] "Archétypes religieux, expérience du soi et théologie chrétienne", *Intériorité*, p. 184. (My translation from the French).

[63] Letters p. 284 (MC, 26.1.73).

[64] *Diary*, p. 344 (4.24.72).

[65] *Diary*, p. 370 (2.2.73). Abhishiktānanda's use of the term *aneka* is explored in detail in Chapter X of this thesis.

[66] "Sannyasa", *Further Shore,* p. 42.

[67] *Diary*, p. 104 (6.7.55).

Abhishiktānanda says that although we cannot escape myth and symbol, some symbols are more powerful and more universal in their deep rootedness in the cosmos. They are often less remote from the invisible archetypes and more meaningful to modern people.[68] And in recognizing the necessity of myth, we will make use of myth as its master, and not be controlled by it.[69]

D. Concept

1. Development of concept from myth

In Abhishiktānanda's view, concepts develop from myth, and it is a mistake to think that there can be a pure concept apart from myth. There are never pure abstractions or pure ideas. They are always supported by myth, and by the symbol in which the fundamental experience of being is delivered. But the abstraction often develops without contact without the Real; the umbilical cord with real experience has been cut.[70] The purpose of concepts is to lead us back to the Real.

> Conceptual structures can never either contain or enclose the *true*, as westerners too often tend to think. Whoever stops short at ideas, misses their message. The True can never be an object either to be possessed or to be made use of. [71]

The danger is to take the concept (*eidos*) for reality itself and to move in the world of signs, formulae, rites and structures, as if they had value in themselves.[72] There is Truth, and there is the conceptual and verbal expression of Truth. Revelations, faiths, dogmas exist at the level of expression; they will never express the Truth except in an imperfect way.

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[68] *Diary*, p. 373 (17.2.73).

[69] *Letters*, pp. 175, 176 (RP, 7.1.66)..

[70] "Théologoumenon Upasana (méditation) sur la Trinité", *Intériorité*, p. 229.

[71] Preface, *Guru*, pp. ix, x.

[72] "The Depth-Dimension of Religious Dialogue", *Vidyajyoti* (1981) Vol. 45 No. 5, p. 211.

2. The grasping nature of concepts

For Abhishiktānanda, concepts are a result of our *grasping* of Reality. But the interior mystery is not thinkable, not to be grasped [*acintya, agrāhya*].[73]

> God cannot be 'grasped,' either by thought or by works, by anything that has to do with the body, with the senses, or by anything of that which is most inward. It is only in the leap–"*jumping*'–beyond oneself…[74]

He gives an analogy of "grasping": in evolution, there is a leap from matter to life. The biological laws are not opposed to physical laws. But the biological laws are not "graspable" through them.[75]

This idea of concepts as a kind of grasping is evidence of Heidegger's influence on Abhishiktānanda. Heidegger speaks of *eidos* or concept as a kind of grasping, a *Vor-Stellung* or re-presentation of an experience to our minds. I have discussed these ideas in the chapter on Methodology, in the context of Mehta's approach to experience. Mehta says that for Heidegger,

> …philosophy aims at conceptualizing, which is a kind of grasping and laying hold of, and at general concepts related together by the purely formal rules of logic, which is only a kind of reckoning or calculating. However useful such grasping and reckoning may be for the sake of achieving certainty in the sphere of essents, they are utterly inadequate when we move in the dimension of Being.[76]

Abhishiktānanda's initial knowledge of Heidegger may have come from Monchanin who was interested in Heidegger.[77] Abhishiktānanda also read at least some works of Heidegger.[78] In 1966, he read Heidegger's *L'essence de la Vérité*, and was impressed by the idea of Being revealing itself in beings.[79]

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[73] *Diary*, p. 142 (3.2.56).

[74] *Diary*, p. 257 (5.5.63).

[75] *Diary*, p. 234 (19.7.60). The next evolutionary leap is from life to love.

[76] J.L. Mehta: "Heidegger's Debt to Dilthey's Hermeneutics and Husserl's Phenomenology.*J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, ed. William J. Jackson (New York: Brill, 1992), p. 49.

[77] See Jacques Gadille: Jules Monchanin: Prophète dans la Culture et dans l'´Eglise de son Temps" in *Jules Monchanin: Regards croisés d'Occident et d'Orient (Lyon: Profac-Credic, 1997).* Monchanin was found reading Hediegger even when ill. Monchanin said, "I never get tired from abstraction." He is reported to have said the same thing on his deathbed. Sten Rodhe: *Jules Monchanin: Pioneer in Christian-Hindu Dialogue*, (Delhi: ISPCK, 1993), p. 4

[78] *Diary*, p. 243.

[79] *Diary*, p. 284 (19.10.66).

3. Inadequacy of Concepts

a) Greek and Jewish thought

Abhishiktānanda says that ever since Plato and especially since Aristotle, the Mediterranean world has lived under the domination of the *eidos*, of *thought and concepts.* But he says that psychoanalysis and structuralism have shown that all concepts and value-judgements are inevitably marked by our archetypes and our hereditary and environmental conditioning.[80] Abhishiktānanda emphasizes going beyond or behind the concept to the underlying archetype, and from there to the underlying experience.

Abhishiktānanda blames Plato and Aristotle for the emphasis on concept. He says that neo-Platonism, Dionysius, Scotus Erigena and the medieval Rhineland mystics showed another path, but this was largely ignored in the West. The "solid common sense of Aristotelianism" won the day.[81]

Like Heidegger, both Monchanin and Abhishiktānanda also appreciate the pre-Socratic philosophers. Both Monchanin and Abhishiktānanda refer to Parmenides several times. This is why Abhishiktānanda sees Plato and Aristotle as the starting point for the grasping nature of concept or *eidos*.

> There is not being and non-being, there is not more being here and less there. There is nothing but being in its adamantine unity, as Parmenides already contemplated at the dawn of Greek thought before Plato oriented the Mediterranean spirit to the side of *eidos* (concept).[82]

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[80] *Guru*, p. ix.

[81] *Diary*, p. 88, (7.1.54). The "other path" is that of apophaticism, which is discussed in more detail *infra*. Abhishiktānanda speaks of "the tyranny of Platonic or Cartesian thought forms." *Letters*, p. 118 (L, 3.6.59).

[82] "Présence de Dieu-Présence à Dieu", *Intériorité*, p. 144. (My translation). Monchanin also expressed appreciation for some of the Pre-Socratics. He opposed Greek to Indian thought, but he made an exception for Heraclitus, who said that The All is divided/undivided, it is born/not born, mortal/iimmortal, Father/Son. Monchanin letter to Betty Heiman [Austrian Indologist] (4.3.55) *Abbé Monchanin: Lettres au Père Le Saux*, ed. Françoise Jacquin (Paris: Cerf, 1995), p. 183.

Even if the pre-Socratics had a better way of handling truth than did Plato and Aristotle, the Hindu *rishis* were there first. Even before Parmenides was fascinated by the mystery of Being, the *rishis* had been awakened to an "awareness" or consciousness of Self.[83]

Christianity depends on the Greek idea of concept.[84] Even the finest pages of St. John and St. Paul are 'woven' on 'thought-patterns' which are foreign to the mental framework in India.[85] For the Christian, even faith is intellectual and conceptual.[86]

The Western idea of meditation is also conceptual. Abhishiktānanda contrasts Indian and western meditation. The Western method focuses on a picture of God in thought or imagination; this *eidos* is always at the level of intellect. The Christian believes that we must "construct" thoughts and feelings in order to make the act Christian–that there must be conceptual references to God.[87] The Christian often confounds the supernatural truth with our "idea" of the supernatural.

In Abhishiktānanda's opinion the Indian method of *sādhana* interiorizes the person, and turns him or her (*meta-noia*) towards what is within.[88] It is the "yogic descent to the depth of oneself."[89] What is essential in this meditation or yoga is the cessation of mental activities (*vritti nirodha*).[90] In meditation you are torn away from signs. There is no reading, no prayer, no *pūjā*, only *dhyāna*.[91]

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[83] *Abhishiktānanda*: "The Upanishads and the Advaitic Experience", *Clergy Monthly,* Dec., 1974, p. 483. Mehta spoke of Heidegger as a Western *Rishi*. J.L. Mehta: *Philosophy and Religion*, p. 31. Heidegger showed that there was a truth "above and beyond the Greek", where *aletheia* "appears to man's natural experience". But all this was "vividly realized by the seers of the *Upanishads* in India and pondered systematically and elaborately by the thinkers of the philosophical tradition which developed there subsequently." J.L. Mehta: "Finding Heidegger", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 31.

[84] *Letters*, p. 152 (L, 20.3.63). He speaks of the legalism of the Jerusalem church, Greek intellectualism and Roman juridicism.

[85] *Letters*, p. 279 (FT, 30.11.72).

[86] *Diary*, p. 88 (7.1.54).

[87] *Diary*, pp. 160, 161 (12.11.56).

[88] *Diary*, p. 239 (1961).

[89] *Diary* , p. 186, (30.11.56)

[90] *Diary*, *p. 135,* (3.1.56). *Yoga Sūtra*, I, 1.

[91] "Cheminements Intérieurs", *Intériorité*, p. 62.

But Abhishiktānanda says that if the westerner is told to go beyond concept to the mystery of the 'unique and non-dual' Self, the westerner immediately begins to conceptualize this.

> …the westerner at once beings to speculate on what this Self is, about the meaning of the *Void*, the *nothingness,* the *fullness*, to which the Scriptures constantly refer. But then the *fullness* which is conceived is no longer *fullness*; nor does *nothingness* or the *void* have anything to do with what abstract thought seeks to lay hold of.[92]

The westerner tries to hold on to or to cling to these thoughts of the non-thought of emptiness. He or she cannot simply *be* nor simply look. The westerner "is like the man who would refuse to breathe until he had broken down the air into oxygen and nitrogen."[93]

Abhishiktānanda clearly preferred Hindu ways of thinking to the Greek way. He says that in the West, postulated truth is apprehended by intelligence in the form of notions or ideas. The Greek ideal is contemplation of these ideas. But India is free of *logos* and of *eidos*.[94] Rather than accepting the primacy of the *eidos*, of the *logos*, of the idea, India has been drawn by Being, life, experience in itself. Notional communication is insufficient for the transmission of the inner mystery. In India, ideas are just a passage in a process, a step that leads to the Real in itself.[95]

Abhishiktānanda also preferred Hindu thought to Jewish thought. He says that the message of Buddha and Ramaṇa both bear the mark of their time. But there is within their message a universality which no Jewish or Greek form of thought can equal.[96] He finds a basic dualism within Jewish thought. This dualism is seen in the idea that humans and God encounter

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[92] Preface, *Guru*, p. x.

[93] Preface, *Guru*, p. xi.

[94] *Diary*, p. 363 (25.12.72).

[95] "Notes de théologie trinitaire", (1970) *Intériorité*, p. 236. And yet, inconsistently, Abhishiktānanda criticized Indians as not being precise in their thought. He criticized an Indian friend for not thinking clearly enough, not seeking the exact meaning of a term (in this case, the term *siddhānta*). Nayak: "Swami Abhishiktānanda (1910-1973): Comme nous, indiens, l'avons vu," p. 50. Abhishiktānanda's view that India is free of *eidos* is also open to criticism. Many of the Indian *darshanas* are highly conceptual. And Abhishiktānanda himself says that Shankara's school of Vedānta is guilty of overconceptualization.

[96] D*iary*, p. 329 (2.7.71).

each other face to face.[97] He says that the typical approach is to project the mystery 'in front of' and 'outside' the self.[98] This cannot meet the challenge of Vedānta:

> Simple monotheism, as it was revealed to Abraham, cannot easily answer the Vedāntic challenge […] In the eyes of the Vedāntin the proclamation of God's transcendence by Jews or Muslims is invalidated by the very fact that they dare to formulate it […] Is he not measuring God by his own human scale at the very moment when he is proclaiming that God is beyond all measurement? Either all this is only a manner of speaking without further value, in which case there is no more to be said; *advaita* then remains the only definitive truth. Or else there is a real prostration and that prostration itself destroys the claim for transcendence, since it presupposes at least some common measure between the one who adores and the One who is adored.[99]

He says that India is free of the historic particularity, the impossible idea of a special "people of God."[100] Abhishiktānanda admits that the Upanishadic message has its own historical background (vedico-brahmanic roots). But he says that it is self-luminous, *svaprakāśa*; it reveals the very light of the depth.[101]

b) Christian thought

Abhishiktānanda also prefers Vedāntic ideas over Christian ideas. He says that Christian institutions and formulations only find their true value when read in the framework of the experience of *ātman-Brahman*, and not through that of Greek philosophy or Hebrew metaphysics.[102]

> The Christian *nāmarūpa* have disappeared…The saving name of Christ is *aham asmi* [I AM]. And the deep confession of faith is no longer the external 'Christ is Lord' but *so'ham asmi* [I am he]…Myself in relation to every conscious being; born in all, ceaselessly.[103]

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[97] Abhishiktānanda: "The Depth-Dimension of Religious Dialogue", *Vidyajyoti* (1981) Vol. 45 No. 5, p. p. 215.

[98] *Meeting Point*, p. 115.

[99] *Saccidānanda*, pp. 45, 46..

[100] *Diary*, p. 363 (25.12.72).

[101] *Diary*, p. 334 (14.12.71).

[102] *Diary*, p. 301 (12.10.68).

[103] *Letters*, p. 272 (MC 16.6.72). And yet after his awakening, Abhishiktānanda uses Christian imagery again, such as the Grail.

In Abhishiktānanda's view, the Upanishads are more universal. Part of their universality is the fact that they are not tied to historical particularity:

> The foundation of the Upanishads is incomparably more universal than that of the Bible, or even of the Gospel; for Jesus is a historical person, and without a relationship to his person which transcends time, no Christianity is possible. But the *rishi* of the Upanishads, like the Buddha, has no personality to assert, no history in which he must be situated. The Buddha's discovery is every man's discovery; the rishi's discovery is within the reach of anyone who is really willing to apply himself to the inner quest and find his freedom.[104]

He says that Christianity, being born into the Greek world, tried to transmit the Christian experience in terms of knowing. It cannot stand up to the expression of the experience in relation to the fundamental experience of the Self.[105] Christianity is also too serious:

> Christianity is really over-serious, with its ruinous principle of [non] contradiction: [the alternatives] is/is not. As if man was capable of taking in at the same time is/is not! Over this India is marvellously playful. Her myths remain living and life-giving, precisely because we do not conceptualize them…[106]

In 1968, Abhishiktānanda writes to a friend that what interests him in Hinduism was its ability to find truth that surpassed all concepts, so that we would no longer have to be prisoner of our thoughts.[107]

c) Hindu thought

Is Abhishiktānanda correct to make such sweeping generalizations of the differences between Hindu and Mediterranean thought? Mehta says that it is true that Indian thinking seeks a truth beyond representational and conceptual thinking:

> The thinkers in the Upanishadic-Buddhist-Advaita tradition were acutely, intensely, and vividly alive to the havoc wrought by representational thinking

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[104] "The Upanishads, an Introduction", *Further Shore*, p.100.

[105] *Letters*, p. 217 (RP 10.7.69).

[106] *Letters*, p. 252 (L.28.9.71). As early as 1953, he referred to his training at Kergonan as being "in deadly earnest", taking approximations as if they were scholastic definitions. *Letters*, p. 64 (L. 29.4.53).

[107] Cited by Baumer-Despeigne in Introduction to *Initiation à la spiritualité des Upanishads:Vers l'autre rive,* (Sisteron: Présence, 1979). p. 20.

> because they lived in awareness of a dimension other than the workaday world in which such thinking is valid, perhaps inevitable as well as necessary.[108]

Advaitic thought does give a great deal of emphasis on the setting aside of our thoughts, so that we may then have a vision of the true self and of what truly is. Mehta gives a number of reasons for this emphasis on overcoming the mind in *advaita*. He says that one reason is the resistance of *advaitic* thought to the two "nihilistic" and "semi-nihilistic" ways of thinking at the time, the Madhyāmika and the Vaisesika ways of thinking:

> According to the first [Madhyāmika], thinking is the positing of an "it is" where there is in reality no entitative Being; according to the latter [Vaisesika], thinking moves within and knows only the realm of entities and is intrinsically categorial in its procedure. [...] the former replaces Being by Nothingness, giving to thinking the preliminary and solely negative role of a dialectical cancellation of its own thetic, positing activity. The latter takes cognizance only of beings, of Being only as a class concept and of Non-being as the absence of a being.[109]

The a*dvaitic* thinking in the Upanishads lives in the tension between these two viewpoints. It refuses to deny the existence of all entities, but it also refuses to accept the position that thinking is only involved with specific entities and categories of those entities. Entities have existence because they are grounded in Being, but we often are confused between the realm of beings and the self of which and for which they are beings.

But not all Indian thought is non-objectifying. Mehta says that the Sanskrit language is itself also metaphysical:

> As Indo-European, Sanskrit also is in some measure "metaphysical", as distinct from the languages of the Far East, with the notions of Being embedded in it, grammatically and conceptually. It is metaphysical in being representational, concept-generating and in being productive of ontological speculation about Being as the ground of all that is, and so giving the appearance of setting up a reality other and higher than this world [...] the Far Eastern languages hold greater promise for the thinking that reaches out to a non-representational mode of utterance.[110]

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[108] J.L. Mehta: "Heidegger and Vedānta", *India and the* West: *The Problem of Understanding* (Harvard, 1985), p. 258. Mehta says that the "two truths" doctrine developed by Nāgārjuna and Shankara is "not quite" the same as Heidegger's distinction between grasping conceptual thinking and meditative non-representational thinking.

[109] *Ibid.* pp. 256, 257.

[110] *Ibid*, p. 238.

If Sanskrit differs from Western languages, it is because within Vedānta there is a self-cancelling thought at work. It has built in a kind of self-negation. It has developed correctives against this representational or objectifying element, thus exhibiting its own unique genius: a mode of utterance in which representation and the cancellation of the representative force are held in tension and balance. There is a "simultaneous de-objectification of the objectified."[111]

Abhishiktānanda says something similar to this. He says that Hinduism and Buddhism have built into them the *neti neti*, the refusal of every *nāmarūpa*. That helps in making the leap to awakening.[112] And he says, "*advaita* relentlessly catapults you beyond all myth."[113] Vedānta takes the short cut. But few are capable of this. We are too immersed in *upādhis* [superimpositions]. That is where philosophies and religions come from.[114]

But Abhishiktānanda says that ultimately all ways of thinking collapse and explode. None is adequate to describe the ultimate mystery. Abhishiktānanda frequently speaks of the "shattering" of his thought. It is likely that that idea of the shattering of thought derives from Heidegger, who says:

> As long as philosophy merely busies itself with continually obstructing the possibility of admittance into the matter for thinking, i.e., into the truth of Being, it stands safely beyond any danger of shattering against the hardness of that matter. Thus to "philosophize" about being shattered is separated by a chasm from a thinking that is shattered. If such thinking were to go fortunately for a man no misfortune would befall him. He would receive the only gift that can come to thinking from Being.[115]

All formulations are *nāmarūpa*, whether they are Upanishadic, Buddhist, Islamic or Christian. These superimpositions, *nāmarūpa*, have to be laid bare:

> Every religion is rooted in a culture, beginning with the most primordial and hidden archetypes which necessarily govern its view of the world. All that is *citta* [thought] is *nāmarūpa*. And every *nāmarūpa has* to be laid bare, so that the *satyam* [Real] may be unveiled. What a savage but marvellous purification. No

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[111] *Ibid*., p. 265, ft. 24. Cf. *Nonduality*, p. 256 Mahāyāna adopts a "double-strategy" which produces a theory about the delusiveness of thought and also dismisses that theory by turning it back against itself.

[112] *Diary*, p. 369 (2.2.73).

[113] *Letters*, p. 188 (L, 22.11.66).

[114] *Diary*, p. 288 (19.11.66).

[115] Heidegger: "Letter on Humanism" p. 223, cited *Nonduality*, p. 167.

> longer even to say ‘I am’, but to be it to such an extent that the whole being ‘exudes’ it.[116]

When the *nāmarūpa* have been laid bare, then we have understood.

> We find ourselves once more Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, for each one has his own line of development, marked out already from his mother’s lap. But we also have the ‘smile’. Not a smile which looks down condescendingly from above, still less a smile of mockery, but one which is simply an opening out, like the flower unfolding its petals.[117]

But even the very obvious theme of *nāmarūpa* has no meaning for someone who has not experienced the depth.[118]

Abhishiktānanda says that Hinduism often gets over-conceptual. He refers to the majority of Vedāntins and even *sādhus* as “*nāmarūpins*” [those who are caught within the words and concepts of *nāmarūpa*]. Abhishiktānanda distrusted all concepts, anything of the mental, of entanglement in *nāmarūpa*.[119] Everything ‘religious’ needs to be stripped off. But you need an intuition that penetrates to the very source of being in order to feel at ease amid this stripping off. When Hindus did not have this intuition, they fell back on discursive thought.[120]

Abhishiktānanda says that *Vedānta* when formulated already goes beyond the *advaitin* intuition, and thus becomes itself also a limited faith-concept.[121] The *advaitic* formulation is also a superimposition. No formulation, even advaita, can be absolute.[122] The *Vedāntin* formulations are just as limiting as those of the Jews and Greeks. If *advaita* becomes a doctrine, if it is institutionalized, it becomes a false *advaita*, a new religion, like the Ramakrishna Mission.[123]

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[116] *Letters*, p. 285 (MC 26.1.73).

[117] *Ibid*.

[118] *Diary*, p. 384 (8.7.73).

[119] R. Panikkar, “Letter to Abhishiktānanda”, p. 430. Another term used by Abhishiktānanda for those caught up in concepts was “*vivartavādins*.”

[120] “The Upanishads: An Introduction”, *Further Shore*, p. 77.

[121] *Diary*, p. 333 (11.12.71).

[122] *Diary*, p. 322 (23.10.70).

[123] *Diary*, p. 289 (19.11.66).

And as soon as *advaita* is presented as a religion, it ceases to be *advaita.*[124] When *advaita* is only a mere intellectual concept, it is more harmful than anything, leading to pride, conceit and egoism.[125]

The reading of the Upanishads is too often approached from the standpoint of a simplified and objectivized Vedānta. The Upanishads are then held in a strait-jacket and forced into agreement with particular formulations. These formulations derive from interpreters of the great masters, who in place of the actual experience of ā*tman-brahman* often disastrously substitute for it some particular *expression* of that experience. This often results in a technical philosophy, with terms like *māyā* and double *Brahman*. These are the "ossification of Upanishadic intuition." They relegate the whole universe, beginning with *Īśvara* (*Brahman* as creator), to a sphere of illusion (or *māyā*), which is barely distinguishable from total unreality.[126]

The mistake of India is to give to the traditional interpretation of the experience of the *rishis* the value of the reality of the experience itself, and of "sclerosing" the "pregnant and supple" notion of *advaita* into a conception very close to monism or of pantheism.[127]

The Hindu myth, just like the Christian myth, must be left behind.[128] The fundamental experience (*anubhava*) must not be confused with a psychical state. It must also not be confused with any formulation, even the Vedāntic one. Non-duality itself is nothing but an expression, limited like any expression of the inexpressible.[129]

The truth of the utterances in the Vedānta is not a truth at the conceptual level, but one that can only be recognized by one who has 'realized himself' in the same experience.[130] It

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[124] *Secret*, p. 84. "Dialogue Postponed" p. 213: "NeoVedantists do not resist the temptation of making a kind of religion of the *advaitic* experience. But Vedanta lies at the level of experience, incommensurable with any kind of rituals, dogmas or social structures."

[125] "An Approach to Hindu Spirituality", *Clergy Review*, (1969), Vol. LIV, No. 3, p. 170

[126] "The Upanishads, an Introduction", *Further Shore,* pp. 73, 74, 100, 101.

[127] "L'Epiphanie de Dieu", *Intériorité*, p. 123.

[128] *Diary*, p. 117 (26.8.55).

[129] "Appel à l'intériorité", *Intériorité*, pp. 163, 164. See also p. 169: The experience cannot even be reduced to the *mahāvākyas* [great sayings] of the Upanishads.

[130] *Meeting Point*, p. 78.

should not be seen like a Western *gnosis*. J*ñāna-mārga* is a "trans-intellectual gnosis."[131] J*ñāna* is not a way of speculation or of abstraction. It is an arcane knowledge, a *mysterium fidei*, a mystery of faith to which one can attain only by raising oneself to a higher level of one's consciousness.[132] *Jñāna* rejects all signs, including a personified God.

There must be an "incineration of all theological notions." This explosion of all notions is what Abhishiktānanda called the "atomic mushroom."[133] The *advaitic* experience causes our ideas and our mind to explode. My ego, my *manas* [mind], my *buddhi* [intellect]–all that will explode in the experience. [134] Not only do our concepts "explode", so do our religions and myths. At the level of the Spirit every *dharma* explodes.[135]

> So long as we have not accepted the *loss* of all concepts, all myths—of Christ, of the church—nothing can be done![136]

d) Apophaticism

Abhishiktānanda's rejection of all religious thought, including Vedānta, would likely surprise many Hindus. Abhishiktānanda points to the *sannyāsī* as the one who has passed beyond the realm of all signs.[137] He sees this as a going beyond all religion. But Gispert-Sauch points out that although a *sannyāsīa* may go beyond *dharma* in the sense of social duties applying to caste, it does not necessarily mean beyond religion. Abhishiktānanda slides too easily from one to the other.[138]

This radical rejection of all religions may be compared to Nāgārjuna's rejection of all "views". Other Buddhist influences are also apparent in his rejection of religion as superimposition:

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[131] "*Esseulement*", Intériorité, p. 127.

[132] "The Experience of God in the Religions of the Far East" (1973), *Eyes of Light*, p.29.

[133] *Letters*, p. 310 (MR, 2.9.73).

[134] *Diary*, p. 193 (5.12.56).

[135] *Diary*, p. 335 (21.12.71).

[136] *Letters*, p. 318 (MC, 26.10.73). Cf. Krüger: *Along Edges*, p. 96: Religions should cultivate the germ that leads to their own demise.

[137] "Sannyāsa", *Further Shore* p. 32.

[138] G. Gispert-Sauch, "Exploring the Further Shore", V*idyajyoti*, Vol. 40, p. 504.

> All that is so-called ‘religious’ consists of what is ‘superimposed’, of a ‘man-made’ sacred intended to take the place of the truly Sacred, unperceived because of its translucidity (cp. The Ten Pictures of Zen).[139]

He also compares the *advaitic* mystery with *śūnyatā:* “I have understood silence–and also what is beyond the silence, emptiness [*śūnyatā*].”[140] It may be that Abhishiktānanda is here using the idea of *śūnyatā* as interpreted by Alan Watts:

> The multiplicity is as real as the unity, since the creature is one with God in the very act of being other than God. Thus we must change the meaning of the statement that God made the world out of nothing, and understand the nothing as the no-thing (*sunyata*), the unutterable mystery, the divine darkness, which is God himself as he appears to human sense and thought and feeling. For this seeming void, this no-thing intelligible to the human mind and its dualistic mode of thought, is God as he is absolutely in himself, beyond all duality–neither one nor many, nor both one and many, and yet with equal reality one and many, and both one and many.[141]

Abhishiktānanda says that the mystery cannot be explained. In a later passage, Abhishiktānanda seems to make an analogy to the Buddha’s flower sermon:

> It is so simple, this mystery of the Within. It is desecrated when you explain it, like a flower when you touch it–a flower is simply to be experienced.[142]

Abhishiktānanda says that Buddhism is a purification from our attempts to conceptualize:

> For me everything is in the Upanishads. But the Buddha’s radically purified training is a marvellous aid for getting inside them. It is a radical deliverance from our attempts to think…[143]

He compares the Buddha to Jesus. Jesus was silent about his experience, just like the Buddha:

> Jesus did not speak much, any more than the Buddha did, about this secret of being that he bore within himself, that he was. And about the *ātman*, our *rishis*

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[139] *Letters*, p. 187 (RP, 29.10.66).

[140] *Diary*, p. 70 (30.3.53).

[141] Alan Watts: *Behold the Spirit* (New York: Random House, 1971, first published 1947), p. 142. Abhishiktānanda had read this book the year before.

[142] *Letters*, p. 290 (MT 22.3.73).

[143] *Letters*, p. 284 (MC, 26.1.73).

> said only that it was beyond all knowledge: neither knowledge nor non-knowledge [*na prajña, nāprajña*].[144]

But Abhishiktānanda's rejection of religion and thought cannot be seen as only Buddhist criticism of Vedānta, because he also criticized Buddhism.

> Ever since the supramundane intuition of the Buddha was given a name, his teaching has been obscured. […] for it is our great misfortune that we take ideas for the reality, even our ideas of the non-reality of ideas.[145]

Abhishiktānanda complains that even the Buddha, the great liberator, now has his altars![146]

Another source for Abhishiktānanda's radical rejection of all religion can be found in his apophaticism.

(1) Monchanin and apophaticism

Many of Abhishiktānanda's ideas about apophaticism derive from Monchanin. Monchanin believed that apophaticism was the link between Western monasticism and the Hindu tradition. Even the Indian name adopted by Monchanin, *Paremārūbyānandam*, refers to "the being without form."[147]

Monchanin says that there are two approaches to spirituality. The first is apophatic. In this approach, God is other than any thing. God transcends not only images but our concepts. The second approach is analogical: reasoning from creatures to God, seeing creatures as the living image of the Creator. This second path is followed by most mystics.[148] But Monchanin chooses the first approach. For him, mysticism is apophatic. It leads to silence.[149]

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[144] *Diary*, p. 157 (8.11.56).

[145] *Letters*, p. 295 (MC 18.4.73).

[146] *Diary*, p. 261 (24.9.63).

[147] Abbé Monchanin: *Lettres au Père Le Saux*, ed. Françoise Jacquin (Paris: Cerf, 1995), p. 15.

[148] Ysabel de Andia: "Jules Monchanin, La Mystique Apophatique et l'Inde", *Jules Monchanin: Regards croisés d'Occident et d'Orient* (Lyon: Profac-Credic 1997), p. 115.

[149] R, Panikkar: "Le Projet Monastique de Monchanin", *Jules Monchanin: Regards croisés d'Occident et d'Orient* (Lyon: Profac-Credic 1997), p. 277. See also Monchanin's preface to Abhishiktānanda's *Guhāntara*. Monchanin relies on the mystical theology of Lossky, an Eastern orthodox theologian. See V. Lossky: "Esquisse d'une théologie mystique de l'Église d'Orient (Paris, 1947). Abhishiktānanda read at least some of Lossky's work, such as his book on Eckhart. *Letters*, p. 152 (L, 20.3.63).

Monchanin believed that the mysticism of St. John of the Cross would be of particular interest to Hindus. He says that this mysticism, as well as that of Eckhart, is the form of spirituality sought by India. It is the rejection of the world of the senses, the rejection even of the *noetic* and beyond that of the psychological. It is the absolute *kenosis* [emptying] for the absolute of Being. Being is itself perceived as beyond and before being, as "presence". It is defined by negations of anthropomorphisms. One rather refers to Being as *tat*.[150]

Monchanin saw similarities between the Vedāntic idea of *apavāda* and apophaticism. This is the successive elimination of limiting forms, or *upādhis*, until we reach *nirguṇa Brahman*. The Upanishads express this apophaticism as *neti, neti* [not this, not that].[151] *Brahman* cannot be described by any terms.

Monchanin says that apophaticism can be looked at on three levels: the logical, ontological and existential.[152] On the logical level, one idea is eliminated for a more comprehensive idea. He saw Plato as representative of this type.

On the ontological level, there are as many kinds of apophaticism as there are metaphysics–our assumptions of self, universe and Being. For example, for Pseudo-Dionysius, God is superessential *hyperousios*. For Thomas, God is *Ipsum esse*.[153] Shankara is more apophatic than Plotinus, but his thought does not reach the Emptiness of the Tao. There is a *philosophia perennis* only in the sense of a perennial problematic. The axis of this problematic is the relation of the One to the many, of Being to beings. Apophaticism on the ontological level may result in negative theology regarding God and in an acosmism regarding the world. On the existential level, apophaticism is "negative mysticism."

Monchanin traces the history of apophaticism. There is some evidence of apophaticism in the Jewish Scriptures. The divine presence as a cloud is an image suggestive of apophaticism.

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[150] Jules Monchanin: *Mystique de l'Inde, mystère chretien*", ed. Suzanne Siauve (Paris: Fayard, 1974), p. 143. (24.11.38).

[151] Jules Monchanin: *Mystique de l'Inde, mystère chretien*", ed. Suzanne Siauve (Paris: Fayard, 1974), p. 122. Monchanin says that this is achieved in *advaita* and Mahayana Buddhism. The comparison to *"neti, neti"* is also made by Alan Watts: *Behold the Spirit*, p. 145, ft. 25. Abhishiktānanda read that book in 1952.

[152] Jules Monchanin: *Mystique de l'Inde, mystère chretien*", ed. Suzanne Siauve (Paris: Fayard, 1974), p. 119.

[153] Ysabel de Andia: "Jules Monchanin, La Mystique Apophatique et l'Inde", *Jules Monchanin: Regards croisés d'Occident et d'Orient* (Lyon: Profac-Credic 1997),, p. 118.

Moses sees only the back of God. The name of God is not pronounced or written. In the New Testament, John 1:18 says that no one has seen God. Paul has an ineffable vision. And Col. 2:9 uses the word *théotés*, an abstract word for deity. It is an apophatic conception of God. Monchanin says that the influence of Plotinus deepened Christian apophaticism. In his opposition to Arianism, Gregory of Nazanzius exalted the incomprehensibility and unintelligibility of God; neither word nor thought can attain to God. His influence and that of Pseudo-Dionysius were found in XVI century Carmelite experience.[154]

Monchanin himself distinguishes between God in his relation to us and God as Divinity (divine essence) beyond human comprehension. These are two sides of the same reality. This is the same as the distinction between God and Godhead.[155] Divinity is beyond the unknown and the unknowable, for which silent praise is the only hymn.[156]

But Monchanin is critical of the *advaitic* experience by itself. He says that the Hindu experience of *advaita* is to be followed by the Christian experience of fullness.[157] He calls this return to the One the "Christian Upanishad". He wants to use this idea to convert Indian monism.[158]

Monchanin also uses Spinoza to criticize the idea of *nirguṇa Brahman*, or *Brahman* "without qualities." He says that the idea of *nirguṇa Brahman* excludes the negation which is given in every determination, or as Spinoza says, *"omnis determinatio est negatio."* Monchanin

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[154] Jacques Gadille: "Jules Monchanin: Prophète dans la Culture et dans l'Église de son Temps" *Jules Monchanin: Regards croisés d'Occident et d'Orient* (Lyon: Profac-Credic, 1997), p. 42.

[155] Ysabel de Andia: "Jules Monchanin, La Mystique Apophatique et l'Inde", *Jules Monchanin: Regards croisés d'Occident et d'Orient* (Lyon: Profac-Credic 1997), p. 120. Monchanin allows this analogy: God and Godhead to *jivātman* and *Iśvara*

[156] Sten Rodhe: "De la vision inclusive de Jules Monchanin à la vision complémentaire de Bede Griffiths", *Jules Monchanin: Regards croisés d'Occident et d'Orient* (Lyon: Profac-Credic 1997), p. 224.

[157] He says that the practice of yoga confounds narcissistic enstasy with mystical experience. Abbé Monchanin: *Lettres au Père Le Saux*, ed. Françoise Jacquin (Paris: Cerf, 1995), p. 24. As we have seen, Abhishiktānanda also refers to a Christian awakening beyond yoga.

[158] Ysabel de Andia: "Jules Monchanin, La Mystique Apophatique et l'Inde" in *Jules Monchanin: Regards croisés d'Occident et d'Orient* (Lyon: Profac-Credic 1997), p. 121.

says that the idea of *nirguṇa Brahman* also ignores the Thomist solution of the divine essence into which all divine names disappear ("*se résorbent*").[159]

(2) Abhishiktānanda and apophaticism

Abhishiktānanda's ideas of apophaticism are in many ways similar to those of Monchanin. The sharp distinction that Abhishiktānanda draws between his own ideas and those of Monchanin needs to be reconsidered in the light of these similarities. Monchanin's sympathies were not with Greek conceptualism. His "Greekness" is that of the Greek fathers and the Neoplatonists more than the Aristotelians.[160]

Even before he went to India, Abhishiktānanda was interested in the apophatic tradition. At Kergonan he read works by the Greek Fathers. He was drawn especially to the following passage from Gregory of Nyssa's *Hymn to God Beyond all Names*.

> O You Who are beyond all
> what name should be given you?
> No name can express You,
> You have all names, and how should I name You?
> You who alone can never be named.[161]

The manuscript that Abhishiktānanda wrote for his mother in 1942, *Amour et Sagesse,* expresses this kind of apophaticism:

> No word can express God, before him every thought falls short, every joy, every delight is nothing compared to the divine beatitude. Beyond, always beyond! It is not your gifts, Lord, that I desire, but yourself. [162]

Like Monchanin, Abhishiktānanda emphasizes the apophaticism of St. John of the Cross. He refers to St. John of the Cross as the purest of the Christian mystical tradition who taught that in the ascent towards God, each and any sign must ultimately disappear. This is the great silence

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[159] *Ibid.* p. 114.

[160] *Ibid* p. 130. *Jules Monchanin: Mystique de l'Inde, mystère chretien*", ed. Suzanne Siauve (Paris: Fayard, 1974), pp. 211-212.

[161] Sr. Pascaline Coff, O.S.B. "Abhishiktānanda: An Interview with Odette Baumer-Despeigne", *Bulletin of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue*, October, 1994, p. 17. See also Abhishiktānanda: *"Dialogue Postponed" Asia Focus*, (1970), Vol. 5, No. 3, p. 222. "You who are beyond all; what name shall I give you?"

[162] *Letters*, pp. 7, 8.

of the depths, the abyss probed only by the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 2:10). It is the "beyondness" beyond all manifestation and understanding (Eph. 3:19).[163] St. John of the Cross experienced the drastic purification of all mental symbols that he called the dark night of the soul. Monchanin interprets St. John of the Cross in terms of the idea of superimposition. St. John analyzes the illusions and conceptual elements that the mind superimposes on the Real. Purification is necessary for those called by God. The encounter with the Vedāntic experience is a dark night of the soul for the Christian and for the Church.[164]

It is this apophaticism that attracted Abhishiktānanda to India. He saw an exact parallel to this apophaticism in India.

> Actually, India brings nothing to the Christian that he or she does not already possess. […] India comes, in its turn, at the moment chosen by God, to aid the Church, if not to discover, at least, to fructify her own treasures.[165]

It is because of its emphasis on monasticism and apophaticism that the Carmelite order is most suited in the Church to plunge into the mystery of India. There is an "admirable kinship" between the fundamental vocation of the Carmelite and that of India.

Abhishiktānanda also saw parallels between apophaticism and Ramaṇa:

> Contact with the Lord is so much higher than words and concepts. This is still Ramana's insight.[166]

Is Abhishiktānanda correct in applying Christian ideas of apophaticism to Ramaṇa? Or is Monchanin correct that the type of apophaticism varies with the kind of metaphysic that we assume? Panikkar raises this same issue of the philosophical assumptions inherent in any apophaticism. He criticizes Abhishiktānanda's rejection of all thought. He says that Abhishiktānanda's desire to live the evangelical myth without theologizing was itself already a philosophical statement.[167] We may ask in particular whether Abhishiktānanda's apophaticism assumes a two-tier view of reality. Is not his apophaticism linked to the assumption that there is

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[163] Abhishiktānanda: "India and the Carmelite Order", *Eyes of Light*, p. 78.

[164] *Ibid* pp. 97, 98.

[165] *Ibid* p. 71.

[166] *Diary*, 261 (16.10.63).

[167] R. Panikkar: "Letter to Abhishiktānanda", p. 443.

another level of Reality that is incommensurable with the empirical reality? After meeting with Harilal, Abhishiktānanda writes,

> One who has reached the Self no longer communicates by words. What he says outwardly by words, he communicates inwardly by his silence. Words are only useful at the level of *māyā*.[168]

To limit words to the level of *māyā* implies that there are levels of reality, and that apophaticism is related to our attempt to experience the higher reality, for which words are not adequate. Panikkar refers to Vedānta's One as being beyond language and thought:

> The *ekam advitīyam*, the One-without-a-second of Vedānta, like the *hen*, or rather the *hyper-hen*, the Super-One of the Platonists, does not belong to the order of thought and therefore not also to that of language (there is no *lingua universalis*).[169]

This issue of a two-tier view of reality will be examined in more detail in a later chapter.

e) Emphasis on experience

Abhishiktānanda opposes thought to experience, *anubhava*. Thought cannot capture completely the nature of the *advaitic* experience. *Advaita* is not a philosophy, but an existential experience. It is this experience that is important, not its formulations.

> Christianity must integrate this experience (I do not say the Indian or Buddhist formulations of it.)[170]

Abhishiktānanda says that his criticism of thought extends to his own writings. In 1970, he said that he should take up the whole subject of *advaita* again, but this time starting with the Vedāntin experience, and not with the Christian faith and symbolism.[171] The difficulty here is that after the experience, there are no words to describe it. One can only be silent:

> What remains to be said after the experience of Ramana and the Upanishads: I AM! You say it, and then are silent.[172]

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[168] *Diary*, p. 64 (15.3.53).

[169] Panikkar, Introduction to *Diary*, p. xviii.

[170] *Abhishiktānanda*: "The Upanishads and the Advaitic Experience", Clergy Monthly*, Dec., 1974, p. 483.*

[171] *Letters*, p. 241 (OB, 23.12.70).

[172] *Letters*, p. 254, (OB 20.10.71).

Advaita must be experienced and not merely thought. Otherwise it becomes "diabolical." "It is one of those remedies which either gives life or it kills."[173] The experience is one of *Being*. He cites Ramaṇa:

> Do not meditate–Be!
> Do not think that you are–Be!
> Don't think about being–*you are!*[174]

Abhishiktānanda says that the Hindu discovery of 'I am' is the only support that abides when everything, everything that was founded on knowing collapses.[175]

Mehta writes regarding the necessity to remove our superimpositions in order to reach the experience:

> The purity of life-experience in early Christianity was falsified or covered up by subsequent superimposition of metaphysical conceptuality. In St. Augustine, the medieval mystics, in Luther and Kierkegaard, Heidegger found attempts to recover the factuality of lived experience, but in every case inappropriate metaphysical concepts came in the way of such recovery. In order to reach the primal experience, therefore, it is necessary to dismantle the conceptual superimpositions and then go on to an explication of that experience as a universal ingredient in the human life-world as such.[176]

Is Abhishiktānanda's emphasis on the experience of Being the same as existentialism? I have already referred to his idea that there must be a "leap" beyond words and *theologoumena*. Abhishiktānanda also uses existentialist language in describing our being as a being towards death:

> A being for death, yes, that is, what he is [*da-sein*] but "precisely in this realization he discovers himself as ontically "beyond", as Brahman, sat, Being, beyond all; himself; *ātman*, beyond all.[177]

He describes Ramaṇa's childhood experience of awakening in relation to this idea of a being-for-death:

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[173] Odette Baumer-Despeigne: "The Spiritual Way of Henri Le Saux Swami Abhishiktānanda", *Bulletin of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue*, 1993, vol. 48, Oct., p. 21 (OB, Feb/67).

[174] *Secret*, p. 75.

[175] *Letters*, p. 210 (AMS 25.1.69).

[176] J.L. Mehta: "Life-Worlds, Sacrality and Interpretive Thinking", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, ed. William J. Jackson (New York: Brill, 1992), p. 212.

[177] *Diary* p. 335 (14.12.71).

> Soon the whole field of his consciousness was filled with this single idea: I can die, I am going to die–or, in existentialist terms: I am a being-for-death.[…] Then, at the precise moment when his personal consciousness was vanishing, his consciousness of simply *being* asserted itself with an overwhelming and liberating clarity and power. Everything has passed away, disappeared--and yet, I *am*![178]

Abhishiktānanda says that we cruelly experience our condition as "being thrown there."[179] This causes existentialist questions to arise, such as: Where do I come from, where am I going? We learn from others of our birth, that we are born of such and such parents, such a date. We learn that all our reasoning is linked to subjective states, and that all philosophies that pretend to enlighten are linked to time, place, cultures, and diverse temperaments. We feel ourselves surrounded by mystery.[180] This conditioning causes fear in us. The fear is called *bhayam* in the Upanishads and *Angst* in existentialism. It is the *sarvam duhkham* of Buddhism.

> My peace, my happiness are all conditioned by "the events" of my life–what happens outside and is received by my senses, what happens inside as well and all that unconscious plane of my psyche revealed by modern psychology…hence the fear which underlies my whole life[181]

Abhishiktānanda says that there are three ways out of this fear:

1. The religious way, from crudest worship of *devas* to Christianity.
2. The philosophical ways of Stoicism and existentialism.
3. The way of the sage. This way is beyond the way of the religious saint and the way of the philosopher. This is what Abhishiktānanda sees as the best way.

The philosopher discovers God in the abstraction of thought, the biblical prophet in the event in which God manifests, himself, the Oriental seer in the most intimate of his consciousness of being.[182] Thus, Abhishiktānanda sees the sage's experience of Being as beyond existentialism.[183]

In some ways, Abhishiktānanda's emphasis on the experience of Being seems to be a reference to the certainty of continued existence apart from death. He refers to Ramaṇa's

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[178] *Saccidānanda*, p. 23.

[179] "Esseulement", *Intériorité*, p. 133.

[180] "Esseulement", *Intériorité*, p. 133.

[181] *Abhishiktānanda*: "The Upanishads and the Advaitic Experience", *Clergy Monthly*, Dec., 1974, p. 477.

[182] "In principio erat verbum", *Intériorité*, (Nov/71) p. 310. (My translation).

[183] Buthe does say that modern existentialism has rediscovered that the creature is inscrutable. *Guhāja*, p. 77.

experience of "self be-ing" as an experience of a '*so-called' mortal* who possessed *being* in his inmost depths. He compares it to the experience Paul had of seeing Jesus alive.[184] And at the time of his own awakening, Abhishiktānanda emphasizes that he discovered himself to be the same in all situations and *loka*. The reference appears to be to a recognition of a participation on another plane of Reality. By participating on this further level of Reality, the sage experiences something beyond religion and beyond philosophical existentialism.

E. Nondual Thinking

1. The continuance of thinking

In the *nirvikalpa* experience there is no thought. What about when we are not in the trance state? Should all thinking be eliminated? According to Loy, the problem is not thought *per se*, but a certain way of thinking–representational thinking.[185] Heidegger never stopped thinking. Zen emphasizes no-thinking.[186] Mehta describes this kind of thinking as a kind of seeing:

> Thinking is a seeing of what comes into view and so a form of experiencing, the profoundest modality of experience in fact.[187]

This view of thinking is similar to what we have already referred to as nondual perception.

Abhishiktānanda agrees that thought continues after enlightenment. In a *Diary* entry from 1963, he says, "to live at a deep level does not mean 'not to think'."[188]

> What is most awful in all that, however is that the poor mind (*manas*) no longer has a taste for anything and cannot do anything, while at the same time it is incapable of remaining without doing something.[189]

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[184] *Diary*, p. 224 (10.12.59).

[185] *Nonduality*, p. 134. Heidegger speaks of meditative thinking and *Gelassenheit*.

[186] *Nonduality*, p. 176.

[187] J.L. Mehta: "Heidegger and Vedānta", *India and the* West: *The Problem of Understanding* (Harvard, 1985), p. 252. See Heidegger: *What is Called Thinking?* (Harper, 1968).

[188] *Diary*, p. 250 (11.2.63).

[189] *Letters*, p. 271 (MC 9.6.72).

Abhishiktānanda says that *advaita* is a new consciousness, a new level of consciousness, in which all ideas are seen as if for the first time.[190] Therefore one still has ideas after enlightenment (in the *jīvanmukta* state). But he does not really explain what this thought looks like.

One view of nondual thinking is that it is when there is no sense of "I" while thinking. Loy says that nondual thought is when thinking is unsupported, without a thinker. For someone liberated, thoughts still arise, but there is no clinging to them, no linking in a series. You negate the thinker distinct from the thought.[191] He refers to Ramaṇa's idea of letting thoughts arise without lining them up in a series:

> The ego in its purity is experienced in the interval between two states or between two thoughts. The ego is like the worm which leaves one hold only after it catches another. Its true nature is known when it is out of contact with objects or thoughts. You should realize this interval as the abiding, unchangeable Reality, your true Being.[192]

Gnānānanda uses the same image, of watching the state of one's mind in the interval between thoughts.[193]

Loy says that in nondual thought, "each thought is experienced as arising and passing away by itself, not "determined" by previous thoughts, but "springing up" "spontaneously."[194] This spontaneous thought is a source of creativity. Loy says that this unsupported thought is an example of emptiness in Māhāyana Buddhism. In contrast to such emptiness, Vedānta understands unchangeable Reality as that which is realized only when it is out of contact with all objects and thoughts.

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[190] *Diary*, p. 326 (20.5.71).

[191] *Nonduality,* p. 135.

[192] *Erase the Ego*, p. 28 , cited in *Nonduality*, p. 144. Ramaṇa acknowledges that this image is taken from the *Tripura Rahasya*. *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, p. 276. See Chapter 17: 12-14 of the *Tripura Rahasya*: "There are also intervals of *Samadhi*, namely the interim period between the waking, dream and sleep states; at the time of sighting a distant object, the mind holding the body at one end projects itself into space until it holds the object at the other end, just as a worm prolongs itself at the time of leaving one hold to catch another hold. Carefully watch the state of mind in the interval."

[193] *Sadguru*, p. 201.

[194] *Nonduality, p. 11.*

Why then did both Ramaṇa and Gnānānanda refer to this image of unsupported thought? In their view, there is an ultimate support. It is the Self, or Mind itself which ultimately supports thought. As Gnānānanda says,

> It is in the *ātman* and not in the mind that you must be aware of everything. In the *atman* we should do our eating, drinking, walking, hearing, reading, writing; all should be done in the light of the *ātman.* In all things the only reality is the *ātman*.[195]

The difference here between the Buddhist and Vedāntin views of unsupported thought is that Vedānta posits another level of Reality, which alone really exists. Buddhism is content to speak of emptiness within one level of reality.

2. Poetry and Aesthetics

In Loy's view, creativity is egoless spontaneity. Ideas come of themselves. He gives numerous examples of creative thinking that seemed to come on their own, both in the arts and in the sciences.[196]

Monchanin and Abhishiktānanda both emphasize the creative use of language in poetry. Neither of them specifically refers to this poetry as nondual thinking.

For Monchanin, poetry is the only language capable of expressing the silence of the contemplation of God. The language of poetry translates that part of eternity contained in the moment.[197] Monchanin wrote poems of his own. He also refers to the poems in which St. John of the Cross expressed his mysticism, such as his "Nuit Obscure" or "Cantique spirituels". Monchanin compares the poetry of St. John of the Cross to that of Aurobindo. Both men were mystics. For such mystical poets, divine experience is translated with more exactitude by poetry than by a philosophical or theological commentary.[198] The poem is the result of "lyrical experience".

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[195] *Guru*, p. 100.

[196] *Nonduality*, pp. 151-158. See also Brewster Ghiselin: *The Creative Process* (New York: Mentor, 1961).

[197] Jules Monchanin: *Regards croisés d'Occident et d'Orient* (Lyon: Profac-Credic, 1997),p. 39. He refers to the views of Gabriel Marcel.

[198] "La pensée de Śri Aurobindo" in *Église vivante*, 1952, no. 3, in *Jules Monchanin: Mystique de l'Inde, mystère chretien*, ed. Suzanne Siauve (Paris: Fayard, 1974), p. 300

Although lyrical experience and mystical experience proceed from the same depth, "they have their own and even an inverse sense." Mysticism leads to silence, whereas lyrical experience leads to poetry. The poem appears as the "reflux" [surging back] of the spiritual experience.[199] I interpret this to mean that poetry is used to express the mystical experience after the "return" from that experience.

Abhishiktānanda also wrote many poems, many of which have still not been published.[200] He also saw poetry as the way to write about that which is "beyond."[201] Abhishiktānanda believed that the West would be able to sensitize itself to mystery through poetry. This would be a poetry that would recover the intimate mystery of each thing, and even more that of the profoundest depth of the heart of humans.[202]

> Art is also a way of access to the mystery, and perhaps–in poetry, painting, music–it reveals him [the mystery of Christ] better than any technical formula.[203]

He describes how he himself had a profound religious experience in response to artistic sculpture. This was in 1955 when he visited the Caves of Elephanta. It was one of the high points of his life, and that he was "thunderstruck" by the image of Shiva with three heads. When saw it, he had to hold on to a pillar for support. He was impressed by the serenity and inner concentration of the central head, Shiva the creator.[204]

He says that painting is another way to penetrate the mystery. In 1959 he met a Russian painter, Rudolf Ray. Abhishiktānanda says that his paintings could penetrate into the interior of beings and things. Abhishiktānanda says it is "something like Jung's psychoanalysis." This artist painted two portraits of Abhishiktānanda. Abhishiktānanda says that the portraits were "shattering and profoundly true."

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[199] Jules Monchanin: *Regards croisés d'Occident et d'Orient* (Lyon: Profac-Credic, 1997),p. 39. He refers to the views of Gabriel Marcel. p. 42. ft. 25. Letter to Duperray June 28/55.

[200] Those that have been published are found primarily in the *Diary* and in *Secret.*

[201] *Letters*, p. 267 (OB 22.5.72).

[202] "India's contribution to Christian Prayer" (1971), Eyes of Light, p. 40.

[203] *Letters*, p. 277 (AF 4.10.72).

[204] *Diary*, p. 81 (L, 18.7.55). Contary to popular understanding, this image is not of a Trimūrti, but shows three aspects of Shiva.

> Behind the mask (is) what I ought to be, showing through. One is the 'pure being', neither dead nor alive, neither (in?) time nor space…the other is in some fashion the resurrection, the return to the world, in a form that again is shattering.[205]

The first image was of himself resting in being; the other was of coming down again, the "return".

3. Paradox

Instead of trying to grasp the *advaitic* experience in concepts, we can speak in parables and paradox. It is by means of these parables and paradoxes that the enlightened one instructs others.

> The words of the real advaitin, like those of the rishis of the Upanishads, are simply paradoxes, to *awaken*, not to instruct.[…] Whoever lives in the world of ideas, needs ideas to explain everything—himself, God, things. When what is beyond ideas has been discovered (…) then Mundaka 2.2.8 "all knots are cut, all doubts blown away, all action (of the mind) is ended.[206]

A *jivanmukta*, even Jesus himself, is restricted in his or her language to the contingencies of our phenomenal consciousness and our mental structures. He or she can only speak in "parables". And only those who have already discovered the Kingdom are in a position to understand the parables of the Kingdom.[207]

The illogicality of the *Gītā* is a deep wisdom.[208] Abhishiktānanda also refers to the paradoxical *koans* of the Zen tradition.[209] Abhishiktānanda says that the Gospels, like the Upanishads, are paradoxical.

> The theologians are afraid of the assertions of the Gospel, and I had to go by way of the Hindu Scriptures in order to accept the Gospel paradoxes in their full truth.[210]

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[205] *Letters*, p. 121 (L, 18.8.59). I have not seen either portrait.

[206] *Letters*, p. 226 (RV 27.2.70).

[207] *Diary*, p. 334 (12.12.71).

[208] *Diary*, p. 360 (23.9.72).

[209] Preface, *Guru*, p. xv. Abhishiktānanda refers to an excerpt from Ramaṇa's *Maharshi's Gospel* in the context of a *koan*. *Guhāntara*, p. 43 (unpublished).

[210] *Letters*, p. 262 (MT, 29.1.72). See also *Letters*, p. 229 (M.4.3.70).

An example of paradox within Abhishiktānanda's own writing is his insistence on *advaita* being both nondual and non-monistic. The Upanishads confirm this experience, but it is often obscured by Hindu theology that attempts to confine the Upanishadic intuitions within mental concepts.[211] Pratima Bowes has written about the paradoxes in the Upanishads. According to Pratima Bowes, there are two types of experience of *Brahman*. There is a double mystical experience of all things, both disappearing into and arising out of the one. The fact that such opposing experiences of the same reality are possible is itself a mystical realization. But a monistic view of the Upanishads removes their paradoxicality. Monism relies on a logic of opposites which does away with paradoxicality. Shankara, for example, says that it is illogical to refer to something as being both stationary and as moving. In fact, both terms are referred to in the Upanishads.[212]

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[211] *Meeting Point*, p. 89.

[212] Pratima Bowes: "Mysticism in the Upaniṣads and in Śankara's Vedānta", *The Yogi and the Mystic*, ed. Karel Werner (London: Curzon Press, 1989),pp. 54 ff.

VII. Nondual Action

Loy says that nondual action is where there is no bifurcation between subject and object, and where there is no difference between the agent and the action.[1] What does this mean, especially in view of our previous discussion about states of consciousness? How does nondual action relate to the two different types of consciousness: *nirvikalpa samādhi (*Pure Consciousness) and s*ahaja samādhi*? How do Abhishiktānanda's actions and ethics relate to each of these two states of consciousness? And on what basis can we judge the actions or non-actions in these states of consciousness?

A. The Fruits of Our Actions

As previously discussed, William James proposed three criteria for judging the authenticity of a religious experience: (a) immediate luminous-ness of the experience (b) philosophical reasonableness and (c) moral effect.[2] In Chapter IV of this thesis, I looked at Abhishiktānanda's descriptions of his experience to assess their degree of immediacy. In Chapter V I addressed some issues as to philosophical reasonableness. James's third criterion is clearly related to actions that result from the experience.

James proposed his pragmatic theory of truth in order to deal with the issue of the authenticity of mystical experience. In the primary "pure experience", what is objective and what is subjective is not predetermined. Thus, mystical experiences do not have to be seen as subjective or unreal. If these experiences heal, enliven, inspire, illumine, or guide us, then we can claim that they are objective or real. This is the pragmatic view of truth.

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[1] *Nonduality, p. 96.*

[2] William James: *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Harvard, 1985), p. 23.

According to James, we must ask whether the religious experience initiates, on the whole and over the long run, positive consequences for the individual and for the community.[3] What are the "fruits" of the experience? Is there an increase in joy or in the capacity to love?

Monchanin uses a pragmatic criterion to judge the experience of Ramaṇa. In an entry of April 12, 1950, Monchanin asks what outward signs there are of a *jīvanmukta*. He says that the supreme criterion is that of direct experience; only a *jīvanmukta* can really know whether or not someone else is a *jīvanmukti*. Monchanin then looks at the fruits of the experience. He lists the following characteristics that he finds in Ramaṇa: equanimity, being beyond contraries, universal benevolence, imperturbable grace [*śanti*], and the state of being beyond good and evil. He also points to consistency between thought and life. He finds in Ramaṇa a remarkable consistency between life and Vedantic doctrine.[4] For example, during the operation on what would prove to be a fatal tumour on his arm, Ramaṇa continued to smile and to behave as if his body was *not-self*. Monchanin sees this as an indication that Ramaṇa lived his doctrine of the successive sheaths of the self. Ramaṇa's method was not meditation so much as a rejection of these illusory sheaths or envelopes that are not the true self. The true self is the *ātman*, unborn, unchanging, unique.

Abhishiktānanda also tested experience by looking to the fruits of the experience. The "touchstone of authenticity" for signs of progress on the paths of *bhakti* and *jñāna* is the progress that is seen on the path of *karma*.[5] He therefore saw a relation between the experiential, intuitive knowledge of *advaita* and one's actions.

When we apply this pragmatic criterion of moral helpfulness, an issue arises as to which morality to apply. Do we judge the fruits of the action from the standpoint of the person having

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[3] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Harvard, 1985), p. 25. James points out that this is an amplification of the Biblical testing of the "fruits" of religious experience. Zaehner uses a similar criterion in judging the value of a mystical experience: does the experience result in love? R.C. Zaehner: *Mysticism Sacred and Profane* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1957).

[4] *Jules Monchanin: Mystique de l'Inde, mystère chretien*, ed. Suzanne Siauve (Paris: Fayard, 1974), April 12, 1950, p. 293. Although he found Ramaṇa's actions to be consistent with his thought, that does not necessarily mean it was a model he personally accepted.

[5] Preface, *Guru*, p. 13. Loy also refers to the necessity of progress in all three yogas: *Nonduality*, p. 286. Krüger uses a pragmatic test to assess religions. He asks whether they have transformative power, and whether they make people free and happy: *Along Edges*, p. 121.

the experience or from the standpoint of an outsider to the experience? Barnard discusses this issue.[6] He points out that most Western ethics make the metaphysical assumption that there are autonomous individuals interacting and competing with other autonomous individuals. What happens to ethics if our self-understanding is different? Individuals can identify themselves with different fields of awareness. Those who identify themselves as separated from others and the world may have an ethics quite different than those who have a sense of unity with broader and deeper levels of reality.

Barnard proposes a "spectrum of ethics."[7] This spectrum is parallel to the Wilber's spectrum of consciousness. Most people will fluctuate in various degrees of mystical awareness, and will need to use a wide range of ethical decision-making strategies. But as one's level of consciousness changes, so does one's ethics. As a person becomes open to deeper levels of reality, his or her ethics become more intuitive. The person is less egotistical but also less subservient to authority.

Barnard's first level of ethics is where one's self-identification is embedded in familial and social roles. In the second level, there is a self-reflexive awareness. The third level relies on openness to intuitive guidance from deeper levels of being. Such intuitive ethics are neither an ethical egoism nor a blind obedience to authority. Barnard says that both secular and theistic metaphysics would have difficulties accepting such an intuitive guidance in ethics. Finally, the fourth level is a "transethical" life. This is the life of the enlightened individual, whose actions are effortless, without agonized decision-making, and whose actions are appropriate to moment-by-moment situations.

It is this last level which raises the most issues. Barnard says that a mystic may exhibit strange ethical behaviour. A religious experience may or may not result in behaviour that is in conformity with previously existing individual or community ethical standards. In fact, a saint may break down and transform ordinary notions of ethics. Barnard refers to an essay by John

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[6] G. William Barnard: *Exploring Unseen Worlds: William James and the Philosophy of Mysticism* (State University of New York Press, 1997).

[7] Barnard, *op. cit.* pp. 264ff.

Coleman on the behaviour of "saints". Coleman says that saints often shatter our ordinary ideas of human wholeness. He argues that "saints do not really follow an ethical logic at all."[8]

Michael Stoeber has explored this issue of transmoral behaviour for individuals who have claimed to be enlightened.[9] He refers to Swami Muktananda, who is considered an enlightened yogi, but who was accused of sexual relations with very young disciples. This is considered to be scandalous behaviour in the West. But within other traditions, such sexual experiences are considered as legitimate ways to achieve an embodied spirituality.[10] Similarly, Adi Da (previously named Franklin Jones, Da Free John, Da Love-Ananda and Da Kalki) was considered to be an authentic spiritual adept by many people. Adi Da has since alienated some followers by the *tantric* shock tactics he uses with his disciples to shatter their egoic awareness. Again, these may be considered to be legitimate forms of behaviour in some traditions. For example, Feuerstein cites Adi Da as an example of the "crazy wisdom" tradition.[11] A more extreme example of such crazy wisdom is Drukpa Kunley, a fifteenth century Tibetan, who killed an elderly disciple, having concluded that it was the time for the disciple to die.

I am not aware of any outrageous behaviour by Abhishiktānanda. In fact, as will be shown, Abhishiktānanda asserts that morality continues for the *jīvanmukti*. Therefore, although the issue of transmoral behaviour is interesting, it need not be discussed further in this thesis.[12]

The focus of this chapter is on how Abhishiktānanda related his actions to his *advaitic* experience. In particular, I will look at how Abhishiktānanda's actions and ethics relate to the two different states of consciousness, *nirvikalpa samādhi* (Pure Consciousness) and *sahaja* (the consciousness of the *jīvanmukta*).

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[8] Barnard, *op. cit*. p. 301.

[9] Michael Stoeber, "Amoral-Trickster or Mystic-Saint? Spiritual Teachers and the Transmoral Narrative" (Catholic University of America, 1999), since published in *Crossing Boundaries: Ethics in the History of Mysticism*, ed. William G. Barnard and Jeffrey Kripal (Seven Bridges Press, 2001).

[10] Even Ramaṇa says that if the *jīvanmukta* appears indulging in sexual pleasures, he must be taken to enjoy the ever-inherent Bliss of the Self, which, divided Itself into the Individual self and the Universal Self, delights in the reunion to regain Its original Nature. *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, p. 423.

[11] George Feuerstein: *Holy Madness: the shock tactics and radical teachings of crazy-wise adepts, holy fools and rascal gurus* (Viking Penguin, 1990).

[12] Chaduc's apparent suicide is of possible relevance here. We may ask whether the *advaitic* experience, at least in the acosmic sense as he understood it, encourages a devaluation of world and body.

B. Nondual Action and Pure Consciousness

1. Monasticism/*Sannyasa*

Abhishiktānanda was initially a monk in France. He wanted to go to India because he wanted a greater degree of renunciation in his monasticism. For him, Christianity should not be comfortable; it should offer no security; it is not a tranquil life.[13] He refers to texts in the Gospels urging the disciple to live a radical life of dispossession. Abhishiktānanda interprets literally many sayings of Jesus that are often read metaphorically. For example, Abhishiktānanda refers to the following sayings of Jesus:

> The Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head…
> Go, sell what you have…and come, follow me…
> Leave the dead to bury the dead…
> No man who puts his hands to the plough and looks back, is fit for the Kingdom of God…
> If anyone…does not 'hate' his father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple…
> Take nothing for your journey–no staff, bag, bread, money, no change of clothes.
> (see Luke 9:58; Mark 10:21; Luke 9:62; 14:26; 9:3, etc.)[14]

Although Abhishiktānanda became a kind of hermit, his initial goal was to found an *ashram* of similarly-minded monks.[15] He gradually came to prefer a less institutional kind of monasticism, like the wandering Hindu *sannyāsin*. He shows some resentment at his previous institutional ideas:

> Personally I needed years to free myself (if indeed I have done so even now) from the infantilism and the lack of a sense of personal responsibility, which was effectively instilled into me on the pretext of obedience.[16]

He also believed that the life of the Hindu *sannyāsin* had a far greater degree of renunciation than did the Christian monk. The *sannyāsin* has complete insecurity and lack of all

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[13] Abhishiktānanda: *Éveil à Dieu, essai sur la prière* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1984), pp. 151-153.

[14] "Sannyāsa", *Further Shore*, p. 54.

[15] Panikkar, Introduction to *Diary*, p. xxii.

[16] *Letters*, p. 167 (FT, 15.12.64).

foothold in the world; he has no house; he depends on others for food; his clothing will become more and more scanty.[17]

At first, Abhishiktānanda regarded this renunciation as a kind of stoicism. The *sannyāsin* is indifferent to comfort or discomfort. It is in this stoic way that he refers to the dualities (*dvandvas*) to be overcome:

> *Sama*, indifference in the face of the *dvandvas* cold, heat, hunger, thirst or…; that is only a beginning, the real thing is indifference to success or [non-] success, to affection or hatred, to honour or scorn, etc.[18]

Abhishiktānanda links the asceticism of the Hindu *sannyāsī* to the belief in the ultimate unreality of the world. The Hindu ascetic *sannyāsī* takes these words seriously.[19]

After Abhishiktānanda had been in India for some time, his idea of monasticism changed from mere outer renunciation to an inner renunciation. He said that he had needed India and Hindu monks in order to understand that monastic life is essentially a life 'within'.[20] There must be a surrender not only of possessions but also of ego. The surrender of ego involves absolute poverty, nakedness, hunger, fasting, a vagrant life without means of support, total solitude in heart, in body and in spirit. It involves the surrender of his ego as a Christian, as a monk and a priest.

> And still more, it involves the breaking of all those bonds that are as old as myself, those bonds that are in the most secret recess of the heart. All that superego derived from my family upbringing, from my whole training as a child, as a young man, as a priest, as a monk.[21]

According to Abhishiktānanda, the *sannyāsī's goal* is the goal of non-possession [*aparigraha*], of nothing being "mine" [*nirmama*]. This arises because there is no longer any "I" to possess anything. The *sannyāsī* no longer has an ego to be the possessor of things. The

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[17] "Sannyāsa", *Further Shore*, p. 6.

[18] *Diary*, p. 33 (4.4.52).

[19] "La Grâce de l'Inde", *Guhāntara* (unpublished excerpt). But Abhishiktānanda was against the idea of penitential mortification, which he saw as "feeding the self." *Lettres d'un sannyāsī chrétien à Joseph Lemarié*, p. 169 (27.5.57).

[20] *Letters*, p. 62, (29.4.53).

[21] *Diary*, p. 136 (6.1.56). Late in life, he referred to Francis of Assisi as the first Christian *sadhu* without any possessions. *Diary*, p. 382 (19.6.73).

sannyāsī lives all alone, in solitude, with no place [*loka*] of his own, not even that of human relationship, with no settled existence. He does not even possess his body [*śarīram*], and must be willing to leave the body at any time.[22]

He says that some *sannyāsīs are bhaktas*, but the goal of the highest kind of *sannyāsī* is "infinite silence."[23] Abhishiktānanda thereby relates the Indian *sannyāsī* to the Western monk's apophatic tradition. The *sannyāsī* gives up naming himself or God, and is committed to silence and apophaticism:

> The *sannyāsī* renounces not only the body and everything related to it, the entire domain of the *bahir karana* (renunciation of rights and freedom from all obligations); but also and likewise the entire *antahkarana*, the psychic domain, *ahamkāra* and *manas*; he renounces the *nāmarūpa* of himself and of God. *Sannyasa* involves a commitment to the apophatic path.[24]

For the *sannyāsī*, true existence is beyond all signs. The *sannyās*ī has renounced "the body and everything related to it." That is the *sannyās*ī's asceticism, in favour of the desire for the Self alone. Abhishiktānanda was conscious of the conflict between his desire for silence and the fact that he published books:

> More than ever I desire solitude and silence. Whatever of good that is in my books stems precisely from this silence.[25]

Bettina Bäumer has commented on Abhishiktānanda's extreme apophaticism. She says that the catchword for Abhishiktānanda was "Disappearance", to leave no signs.[26] This passion for annihilation is related to an extreme acosmism.

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[22] *Diary*, p. 383 (5.7.73).

[23] "An Approach to Hindu Spirituality" *Clergy Review,* 1969, LIV No. 3, p. 171.

[24] *Diary*, p. 88 (7.1.54).

[25] Odette Baumer-Despeigne: "The Spiritual Way of Henri Le Saux Swami Abhishiktānanda", *Bulletin of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue*, 1993, vol. 48, Oct., p. 23.

[26] See Susan Visvanathan: *An Ethnography of Mysticism: The Narrative of Abhishiktānanda, a French Monk in India (Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1998)*, p. 100. Does this extreme apophaticism explain Chaduc's apparent offering of himself to the Ganges?

2. Acosmism

According to Panikkar, Abhishiktānanda's ideal was acosmism: to be without birth, place, goal or anything at all.[27] The true *sannyāsī* is as if not born. This is why Chaduc took the name Ajatānanda ("Bliss of the Not-born") at his *dīkshā*. Abhishiktānanda's ideal of acosmism is also the reason that he was attracted to the Carmelite order:

> However the Carmel–at least as it is idealized in my vision of it–is perhaps the closest to India's deepest aspirations: the acosmics of the Desert Fathers; the "Flee, be silent, remain at rest" of Arsenius; the '*nada*' [nothing] of St. John of the Cross; above all, the going beyond, the "establishment of oneself beyond oneself" of Tauler and Eckhart.[28]

For Abhishiktānanda, *sannyāsa* is not just a stage of life, but a truly transcendent state beyond every stage:

> S*annyāsa* should not be regarded as a fourth *āśrama*, or state of life, which follows after the three stages of being a student (*brahmacāri*), a householder (*grihastha*) and living in retirement in the forest (*vanaprastha*); rather it is *atyāśrama*, beyond every state of life. It belongs to no category whatever, and cannot be undertaken along with anything else. It is truly transcendent, as God himself transcends all, being apart from all, beyond all, and yet immanent in all without any duality.[29]

Abhishiktānanda seems to regard *sannyāsa* as transcending the other three states just as the *turīya* state transcends the three states of consciousness. This transcendence of the *sannyāsa* state appears to be an innovation on his part when compared with the traditional Hindu understanding.

Abhishiktānanda's view of "transcendence" of life is related to a devaluation of the world. It is also related to a view of the world as *māyā* in the sense of illusion, where only the One is real. In attaining this transcendent consciousness, the *sannyāsī* sees God as God sees Himself:

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[27] Panikkar, Introduction to *Diary*, p. xx. Panikkar points out that it was only relative acosmism for Abhishiktānanda; he had dwellings: a hermitage at Shantivanam and another at Uttarkashi. Abhishiktānanda says that Panikkar chose to live out this essential acosmism in the the world instead of in solitude. *Lettres d'un sannyāsī chrétien à Joseph Lemarié*, p. 216 (31.12.58).=

[28] *Letters*, p. 123 (FT, 26.10.59).

[29] *Further Shore*, p. 4.

> The *sannyāsī* is the one who has centred his life on *brahmavidyā* [knowing *Brahman*], on the unutterable consciousness which God has of himself; and which the human being is only capable of attaining once he is freed from all super-impositions.[30]

During his month of silence at Kumbakkonam, Abhishiktānanda wrote that in the *brahmavidyā* there is not another than oneself knowing *Brahman*. There is nothing other than *Brahman*. It is *Brahman* who was great in Ramaṇa. Ramaṇa was the image (*mūrti*) of the Self. Only *Brahman* is Real, so that there is no longer even anyone to adore:

> And so when I say "You" to you, it is no more than literary fiction! This "I" that tries to affirm itself by still calling you "You" is a soap bubble floating in the air. And that soap bubble which floats in the *ākāśa*, the space of my heart, it is still You.[31]

It is interesting that Abhishiktānanda speaks of his views and those of Monchanin as being "gnostic".[32] This seems to refer to their preference for a spiritual knowledge that is unrelated to the physical world or to the body. In 1972, Abhishiktānanda was briefly hospitalized. He acknowledges at this time the danger of his Gnosticism:

> This recall to the most commonplace realities of the human body is a marvellous counter-balance to the danger of the "higher gnosis" of the environment in which I often live. The Lord is present everywhere. Everything is Brahman, no less the painful spot which engages your whole attention than the silence of all your faculties. Everything is grace![33]

This emphasis that everything is *Brahman* is a reminder of the *sahaja* awareness. The *sannyāsī* is "the true dweller in the depth", the '*guhāntara*'.

> He plans nothing, worries about nothing, desires nothing, takes delight in nothing, is distressed about nothing. He lives in the essential joy. . . secure from everything 'outward'.[34]

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[30] *Diary*, p. 35 (5.4.52).

[31] *Diary*, pp. 171, 172 (24.11.56). Only the unenlightened see more than one *jñāni* in the world. "Cheminements Intérieurs", *Intériorité*, p. 58.

[32] *Letters*, p. 70 (L.2.4.54).

[33] *Letters*, p. 276 (OB, 31.8.72).

[34] *Letters*, p. 80 (L, 20.6.55). Abhishiktānanda adds the comment How far I am from all that!"

I interpret this as saying that in the *sahaja* state, there are no personal desires or attachments, and therefore no distress. But there is an "essential joy" in living. But in the *nirvikalpa samādhi*, all joy must be left behind.

> I have to leave behind my joy! But I have to leave behind my peace! So also said the Buddha.[35]

But why should that experience be seen as joyless? Bharati says that the ascetic interpretation of this state is incorrect, and that it is in fact the most pleasurable experience.[36]

Is an acosmic life even necessary? This is really the same question of whether *nirvikalpa samādhi* is necessary. In such a state of Pure Consciousness, there is no consciousness of anything. Thus, it is related to an acosmic view. As discussed, Abhishiktānanda regards *nirvikalpa samādhi* as a necessary step in attaining *advaita*.

Abhishiktānanda encouraged Chaduc to live an acosmic life, at least for a time:

> I do not think that literal acosmism: nakedness, total solitude, etc.…should normally be a permanent condition, except for rare individuals (…) But there is an acosmism, which springs as it were spontaneously from their inner experience, that which the Gospel saying seeks to express: "to be in the world, but not of the world."
> But that you should have to begin with a long period of literal acosmism, I quite agree. You will live that either here or elsewhere. [37]

Abhishiktānanda does not explain how acosmism can be a permanent condition for these "rare individuals." His emphasis on the temporary nature of acosmism suggests that it is related to the transitory state of Pure Consciousness. The acosmism of the Gospel, to be in the world but not of the world, is the *sahaja* state. This is confirmed by another letter where Abhishiktānanda makes a distinction between acosmism and "true acosmism":

> Acosmism can in fact be egocentric. (…) True acosmism coincides with total 'cosmism', as surely as true transcendence cannot in the end be distinguished from immanence.[38]

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[35] *Diary*, p. 145 (5.3.56, at Tapovanam). Whether or not this was the view of the Buddha may be debated. Such *sannyāsa* is certainly related to the Buddha's repudiation of any sense of self and its cravings.

[36] Agehananda Bharati: *The Light at the Center: Context and Pretext of Modern Mysticism* (Santa Barbara: Ross-Erikson, 1976).

[37] *Letters*, p. 294 (MC, 12.4.73).

[38] *Letters*, p. 190 (AMS, 9.2.67).

Immanence is living in the world, or 'cosmism.'

Abhishiktānanda did not believe that acosmism was necessary for everyone who has achieved enlightenment. A person having the *advaitic* experience may thereafter lead a monastic life, as a witness to the experience. Or the person having the experience may continue to live a temporal life. As an example of such a person, he pointed to his friend Harilal, who was a mining engineer. The enlightened person may be indifferent to life or participating in life:

> The acosmic—the 'hairy one', *keshi*, of the rig-Veda—can make his way through the world totally indifferent to everything, looking neither to the right nor to the left; and he can just as well make his way with a smile for all, radiating the life of 'interchange', as God does when passing through time without leaving his eternity.[39]

This is a different sense of acosmism than *nirvikalpa samādhi*. It is what Abhishiktānanda calls "true acosmism", or "the acosmism of the Gospel." I believe that Abhishiktānanda is reinterpreting acosmism to fit the *sahaja* state of awareness.

Although we may choose to be a *sannyāsī*, this is not necessary. Any honest career whatsoever can be suitable, whether secular or ecclesiastic. The important thing is to be a witness to the "presence" of the Self.[40] If one lives one's life in solitude and silence, then this will be a sign to others of the transcendence of the *ātman*. It is a reminder that "God alone lives."[41] But if one lives one's life among others, he or she will be a sign of the universal presence of this same *ātman*.

He says that the *sannyāsī who* lives in world has a more demanding role than one who has renounced the world in a literal sense. The life of a *jñāni* lived with others and in connection with ordinary human activities calls for a deeper degree of renunciation than the traditional life of silence and solitude.[42] In an interesting passage, Abhishiktānanda says that

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[39] *Letters*, p. 292 (MC, 4.4.73).

[40] "The Theology of Presence as a Form of Evangelization in the Context of Non-Christian Religions" (1971), *Eyes of Light*, p. 62.

[41] *Further Shore*, p. 15.

[42] *Further Shore,* p. 16.

sannyāsa itself must be renounced. "He who renounces both *sannyāsa* and non-*sannyāsa* is the true *sannyāsī*."[43]

Abhishiktānanda also recognized that this role of living in the world would become much more common for the enlightened person.

> The knell has been tolled for the time when religious man–Christian not excluded–could content himself with living his faith in a well guarded area of sacred times, places, acts and structures. […] It is in the very core of the so-called profane itself that man is reminded now that he has to deal with God.[44]

Ramaṇa held that the enlightened person could continue to act in the world and still be detached. Some enlightened people withdraw to solitary places and abstain from all activity; others carry on trade or business or rule a kingdom. There is no general rule.[45] For Ramaṇa, the key in acting as an enlightened person is knowing that you are not the doer of your actions. The householder when detached, renders "selfless service" to his family.[46] True *sannyāsa* is renouncing one's individuality, not shaving one's head and putting on ochre robes.[47] True renunciation is non-identification of the Self with the non-self.[48] This idea of true renunciation is very similar to what Abhishiktānanda referred to as "true acosmism" and "true *sannyāsī*. According to Fort, Ramaṇa rejected the traditional view of renunciation.[49]

Gnānānanda also said that the liberated person could return to the world. Once one has found complete inner stability, one can return to a daily contact with the world without any risk.[50]

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[43] Cited in *Letters*, p. 291

[44] Abhishiktānanda: "Communication in the Spirit", *Religion and Society*, 1970 Vol. XVII, NO. 3, 1970, p. 38. But see *Further Shore*, p. 15, where Abhishiktānanda regrets the development away from acosmism.

[45] *The Teachings of Ramana Maharshi*, p. 186.

[46] *Ibid* p. 81.

[47] *Ibid* pp. 79, 84.

[48] *Ibid* p. 84.

[49] Fort, *op. cit*. p. 142.

[50] *Sadguru*, p. 133:

3. Non involvement

a) To be is more important than to do

Abhishiktānanda was concerned about poverty in India. He found that if he gave to someone in need, there are always ten or twenty more in the same plight.[51] He himself sent funds all his life to a family in Tamilnadu, even though he himself did not have much.[52] For a time, Abhishiktānanda followed Vinoba Bhave, whom he regarded as Gandhi's greatest disciple, on part of his pilgrimage where he asked for voluntary gifts of land for the poor.[53]

And yet despite his concern for the poor, Abhishiktānanda warns that it is more important to be than to act:

> Westerners are always anxious to be *doing*! But we come to India, and there we learn simply *to be*; and being is the most intense form of action. No external movement in the physical world is so intense as the movement at the heart of the atom, through which indeed it exists. So it is with us; and that is our essential vocation as monks, nuns, contemplatives.[54]

Many of Abhishiktānanda's writings stress the acosmic life and non-involvement with the world. It has been pointed out that Abhishiktānanda cites mainly the Gospel of John, the mystical Jesus, not the synoptics and their concern with the poor and social injustice.[55]

Abhishiktānanda's aim in starting the ashram Shantivanam was to be in the presence of God without any further object. He writes to Monchanin in 1947 that all the social usefulness of monasticism (economic, or religious and intellectual), if it is to be kept in its right place, must be a fruit, not an end in itself.[56] It is enough that a monk lives within himself.[57] In 1973, at the end of his life, he writes, "My work is to be."[58]

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[51] *Letters*, p. 26 (F, 1.8.49).

[52] James A. Wiseman: "Enveloped by Mystery", *Église et Théologie*, (1992), 23, p. 252.

[53] *Letters*, pp. 100, 101 (F.28.1.57).

[54] *Letters*, p. 117 (MT 19.3.59).

[55] Marc de Smedt (ed.): *Question de Christ et Vedanta: L'expérience d'Henry Le Saux en Inde* (Albin Michel, 1991), p. 95.

[56] *Letters*, p. 19 (18.8.47).

[57] *Diary*, p. 62 (8.3.53).

[58] *Diary*, p. 384 (5.7.73).

The *sannyāsī* is one who has been fascinated by the mystery of God …and remains simply gazing at it.[59] The *sannyāsī* has one desire: God alone. The *sannyāsī* can no longer 'act his part' in this world; that is the business of others whose calling it is to act out the Lord's *līlā* in this universe.[60] He is as dead to society as the man whose corpse is on the burning-ghat.[61]

> The *sannyāsī* is essentially acosmic, just as were the original Christian monks. So long as this is not clearly understood, it is impossible to recognize either his essential commitment or the complete freedom (and non-commitment to the world that he enjoys. As soon as he feels that he has some duty or obligation towards anyone else, whether it be self-chosen or imposed on him by others, he has fallen away from the true ideal of *sannyāsa*, and no longer performs the essential function for which he was set apart from society–to witness to the one unique Absolute. This can never be sufficiently stressed in these days, when there is continual pressure upon Hindu *sannyāsīs* here (just as there is on Christian monks in the West) to *do* something or other–whereas in fact the only thing that should be required of them is to *be*, in the deepest sense of the word.[62]

In Abhishiktānanda's view, ethics are not the primary focus of the *sannyāsin*. But our participation in the Kingdom is of an ontological and existential order, not just moral or functional.[63] Most seminarians plunge into social issues in order to avoid the deep problems.[64]

Abhishiktānanda was upset by the actions of another Christian Benedictine monk who had opened a soap factory in order to support an *ashram* in Uttar Pradesh. Abhishiktānanda was concerned that the monks would not have time for prayer and contemplation.[65]

When Abhishiktānanda was in his hermitage in Gyansu, Abhishiktānanda moved a bookshelf into his hut. He was troubled when this resulted in his landlord referring to him as a *karmat*, an activist.[66]

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[59] *Swami Parama Arubi Anandam (Memoir of Fr. J. Monchanin)*, p. 35, cited in Letters, p. 38).

[60] *Further Shore*, p. 6.

[61] *Further Shore*, p. 14.

[62] "Sannyāsa*", Further Shore*, pp. 13, 14.

[63] *Meeting Point,* pp. 107, 108.

[64] *Letters*, p. 278 (RP, 18.10.72).

[65] Anand Nayak: "Swami Abhishiktānanda (1910-1973): Comme nous, indiens, l'avons vu–un témoignage", *Neue Zeitschrift für Missions-gewissenschaft*, 45-1989/1, p. 47. This should be contrasted with Abhishiktānanda's statement in *Saccidānanda* p. 152: "Anyone who refuses to do the world's work merely on the excuse that he must ensure peace and quiet for contemplation, has not begun to understand the meaning of *jñāna*."

Abhishiktānanda corresponded with Chaduc before Chaduc came to India. He advised Chaduc:

> Be concerned *to be* and not to *do*…or even to understand intellectually […] Give a sabbatical year at least to your Mind![67]

Even in the last year of his life, Abhishiktānanda writes,

> *Sannyāsa* is incompatible with any activity whatever–at least with any activity that is willed and chosen [*samkalpa*]. Only the demands of nature and the spontaneity of the Spirit can call for actions on his part. Preach, write, build?[68]

Ramaṇa also says it is not necessary for the enlightened person to do anything. Self-enquiry is enough for acquiring all the divine qualities; one needs not do anything else. If one attends to self-reform, social reform will take care of itself.[69] If God created the world, it is His business to look after it, not ours.[70]

Gnānānanda ridiculed the egotism and vanity of doing things:

> A man boasting that he accomplished this or that is as ridiculous and vain as a lizard saying that it kept a building intact, preventing it from collapsing or the claim that a host of mosquitoes could make a tower collapse.[71]

b) The monk as witness to the Absolute

Abhishiktānanda says that the acosmic monk is present in the world as *witness* to the Absolute:

> These acosmics are not less present in the world than those who are thrown into the great stream of life, but they are present to the world in the very mystery where this stream has its origin. They are witnesses of the Absolute, the *kaivalya*, the Immovable One, the *A-chala*, and witness it in the name of the world, this world on whose fringe they seem to live. They are like the pivots of this world, keeping it firmly fixed in the immovable by their very immobility.[72]

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[66] *Ibid.* p. 53.

[67] *Letters*, p. 219 (MC 29.9.69).

[68] *Diary*, p. 382 (19.6.73).

[69] *The Teachings of Ramana Maharshi*, p. 85.

[70] *Ibid* p. 87.

[71] *Sadguru*, p. 96, ft. 3.

[72] *The Mountain of the Lord*, p. 163.

Strictly speaking this idea of the witness is not acosmism, since there are “others” for whom one is a witness. Abhishiktānanda says that in India *sannyāsa* may have been misused and it may have degenerated. But it is the highest expression of India’s intuition “that God alone is. The acosmic is a “sign of the Real in an egocentric world,” a “pure manifestation of Self.”[73] By “Real”, Abhishiktānanda means the unchanging Self, the substratum of the world. This shows that his idea of acosmism is related to his idea of different levels of Reality.

The monk’s real task is to be without any task. The monk is a witness to the End [*eschaton*] from the Christian viewpoint and to the permanent (*nitya*) from the Vedāntin viewpoint.[74] The monk bears witness to the fact that God is beyond all things and that time has come from eternity and is returning to eternity. The monk is the witness of *advaita*, of the non-duality of being through all the changing seasons and multiplicity of material forms.[75]

c) Microcosm

One reason that the acosmic in his or her solitude can help the whole world is by the idea of microcosm/macrocosm. Abhishiktānanda says that there is a relation between the Self in us, and the Self in the world. We are a microcosm, and what we do is reflected in the world as macrocosm.

> Man is a 'microcosm', and only by opening up in man the foundation of his being can the Spirit transform and spiritualize the cosmos to its depths.[76]

He says that the parts of a person’s body relate to the five elements and five cardinal points.[77] The game that we play in our body can be played with the same serenity as we play it in the universe.[78]

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[73] “An Approach to Hindu Spirituality”, *Clergy Review* (1969) LIV, No. 3, p. 171 and "Cheminements Intérieurs", *Intériorité*, pp. 57-59.

[74] *Diary*, p. 246 (13.11.62).

[75] *Mountain of the Lord*, p. 167.

[76] *Saccidānanda*, p. 87.

[77] *Guru*, p. 49.

[78] *Diary*, p. 167 (21.11.56).

> Humanity is so constituted that the whole race is summed up and comes to fulfillment in the individual, while at the same time the individual can only reach his fulfillment in the whole.[79]

Because the *sannyāsī* is a microcosm, his presence need not be known to other people in order to have an effect on the macrocosm:

> Even if he were totally unknown, his mere presence before God in the name of his people at this holy place [Arunāchala] is enough.[80]

Abhishiktānanda says that because of the essential connectedness of all human beings, when you awake, you awake with and on behalf of all.[81] Salvation is therefore not just an individual's awakening to Self. Insofar as we are all inter-related, and insofar as the Self is in everything and everyone, salvation is related to the whole temporal world. *Advaita* should result in the total integration of the whole person and in the integration of each person in the totality of mankind. Religion is a form of service, not an end in itself.[82]

4. Criticism of acosmism

Acosmism has been criticized as being monistic and not nondual at all. For example, Dupuis says that *advaita* is not monism and it is therefore not acosmism.[83]

Unless we accept some version of the microcosm/macrocosm idea, acosmism leads to a devaluation of the world. The suffering in the world is ignored. Ramaṇa has been criticized for such indifference to suffering in the world. He says that our concern about the world's suffering comes from our misidentification of the body and the self:

> When you are not aware of the world, that is to say when you remain as the Self in the state of sleep, its sufferings do not affect you. Therefore turn inwards and seek the Self and there will be an end both of the world and of its miseries.[84]

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[79] *Saccidānanda*, p. 135.

[80] *Diary*, p. 62 (8.3.53).

[81] *Diary*, p. 369 (2.2.73).

[82] *Letters*, p. 206 (OB 1.10.68).

[83] J. Dupuis, Introduction to *Intériorité*: p. 18.

[84] *The Teachings of Ramana Maharshi*, p. 38, cited by Fort, *op. cit.* p. 143.

This is an idealist view of the world and its suffering–neither exists except within our thoughts. Ramaṇa says that both the world and the pain are within us. War, for example, is just a thought of the deluded questioner. All suffering is due to the false notion' I am the body.' Getting rid of this false idea is knowledge.[85] Realization is the best help you possibly can give others. But in fact there are no others to help.[86]

Ramaṇa's answer to suffering in the world is that one should be concerned only about the Self, which does not suffer and is indestructible. Ramaṇa's ethics are therefore an ethic of non-involvement in the world. Sometimes Ramaṇa says that we must just follow the prevailing ethics in the phenomenal world. Ramananda Swarnagiri relates how Ramaṇa was asked about the plight of the untouchables. Ramana replied, "We have left the world and society. Why do you pose questions about social problems?" When the visitor persisted in the question, he said, "In these matters, the one who searches for spiritual development only has to conform to the attitude of the majority."[87]

Abhishiktānanda rejects such an idealist view of the world. In a *Diary* entry from 1952, he writes that even if a person could momentarily escape from his condition and live the life of a *vijñāvādin,*[88] our incarnate condition has made us a social being. We are linked to our flesh and thus to the universe.[89]

At other times, Ramaṇa takes a more realist view of the world. The world exists, but we do not have to be active. *Mahatmas* help the world by their silent centredness. They accomplish more than others do. It is better to silently send out an intuitive force than to preach to others. Self-reform automatically results in social reform. Realization of the Self is the greatest help that can be given to humanity. And a realized person helps the whole of mankind, although without their knowledge.[90]

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[85] *The Teachings of Ramana Maharshi*, pp. 40-42.

[86] *Ibid* p. 186.

[87] Jean Herbert: *Études sur Ramana Maharshi* (Dervy-Livres, 1972), p. 217.

[88] A *vijñāvādin* is one for whom only mind or thought are real. It is an idealist school of Buddhist philosophy.

[89] *Diary*, p. 46 (12.6.52).

[90] *The Teachings of Ramana Maharshi*, pp. 90-92.

Fort says that the closest that Ramaṇa comes to acknowledging the need to take action in the world is in the following question and response:

> Question: But we see pain in the world. A man is hungry. It is a physical reality. It is very real to him. Are we to call it a dream and remain unmoved by his suffering?
>
> Bhagavan: […] But all this is not to say that while you are in the dream you can act as if the suffering you feel in it is not real. The hungry in the dream has to be appeased by dream food.[91]

Even if this can be interpreted as a direction for social action, Ramaṇa is devaluing the hunger and the food; they are only a dream reality.

Several years after first meeting Ramaṇa, Paul Brunton became disillusioned with Ramaṇa's acosmism. Ramaṇa did not give him the instruction that he expected. And Ramaṇa did not seem to care how affairs in the *ashram* were being managed.

> He possessed a tremendous power of concentrating attention inwardly and losing himself in rapt trance, of sitting calm and unmoved like a tree. But with all the deep respect and affection I feel for him, it must be said that the role of a teaching sage was not his forte because he was primarily a self-absorbed mystic. This explained why his open disdain for life's practical fulfilment in disinterested service of others had led to inevitable consequences of a disappointing kind in his immediate external environment. It was doubtless more than enough for himself and certainly for his adoring followers that he had perfected himself in indifference to worldly attractions and in the control of restless mind. He did not ask for more. The question of the significance of the universe in which he lived did not appear to trouble him. The question of the significance of the human being did trouble him and he had found an answer which satisfied him.[92]

Brunton criticizes the way the *ashram* was run. He says that Ramaṇa's ascetic indifference to the world had rendered him "temperamentally disinclined to exercise the slightest control." [93]

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[91] *Ibid* pp. 87,88. Fort refers to one other quotation that suggests that doing good is important. "The *jivanmukta* lives only for the good of the world." (*Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, p. 423).

[92] Paul Brunton: *The Hidden Teaching Beyond Yoga* (London: Rider, 1941), pp. 15,16.

[93] *The Hidden Teaching Beyond Yoga,* p. 18. It is interesting that Gnānānanda, unlike Ramana, was directly involved in his ashram. Abhishiktānanda thought that he was too directly involved. *Guru*, p. 83.

Brunton says that meditation on oneself is a necessary and admirable pursuit but it does not constitute the entire activity which life is constantly asking of us. Meditation apart from experience is "inevitably empty." He criticizes the emphasis on trance:

> After one emerged from the state of trance or contemplation the exalted feeling slowly and gently subsided, leaving at last only a lingering after-echo. Therefore one had to repeat the experience daily if one wanted to live again in the original condition…[94]

Brunton says that illuminations gained by yoga or by trance states are always temporary ones. Brunton cites Aurobindo:

> Trance is a way of escape--the body is made quiet, the physical mind is in a state of torpor, the inner consciousness is left free to go on with its experience. *The disadvantage is that trance becomes indispensable and that the problem of the waking consciousness is not solved, it remains imperfect.*[95]

It is interesting to compare this with Wilber's evaluation of Ramaṇa. Wilber writes that although Ramaṇa's Self-realization was unsurpassed, he is not an exemplary representative of an integral view. In other words, he did not live a life integrated in all of Wilber's four quadrants.[96]

If Wilber is correct, then just because a person has attained the Pure Consciousness experience does not mean that that person will inevitably lead a more ethical or more integrated life. Bharati says that the Pure Consciousness experience, which he refers to as the "zero experience", has no ethical consequences whatsoever. The zero experience is extremely pleasurable. But there is no guarantee that the person returning from the experience will have any increased ethical awareness. In fact, the person is often more asocial.[97] This raises the issue I have previously referred to: is there a spectrum of ethics, with different ethics applying to the realized person?

Lott says that the enstatic experience of the yogic discipline can lead one to a sense of unity. This is what Zaehner calls the "pan-en-henic vision" in which everything is experienced

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[94] *The Hidden Teaching Beyond Yoga*, p. 26.

[95] Cited in *The Hidden Teaching Beyond Yoga*, p. 27.

[96] Ken Wilber: *One Taste* (Boston: Shambhala, 1999), p. 201. For Wilber, the x-axis of these four quadrants is Interior/Exterior and the y-axis is Individual/Collective. All quadrants can be lived on many levels such as physical, emotional, mental, soul and spirit. See *The Marriage of Sense and Soul,* p. 64.

[97] Bharati*, op. cit.* p. 71.

as one.[98] But is a sense of unity enough? Zaehner says it is not. He refers to the cult murders by Charles Manson which were committed during a feeling of unity.[99]

Krüger says that we need a sense of separateness as well as that of oneness. Taken alone, the ideas of 'separateness' and 'oneness' will in themselves lead to intellectual, and ultimately political and physical violence.[100]

Panikkar discusses the usefulness of the acosmic life. He accompanied Abhishiktānanda on a pilgrimage to Gangotri. This pilgrimage is recorded in *The Mountain of the Lord*. Together they discussed the value of acosmism. Panikkar expressed the view that *sannyāsa* is beautiful and moving, but corresponds to a stage of the religious and psychological evolution of humanity that would be out of date. He says that such a life was necessary in the early days of Christianity, too:

> Following the martyrs it was the monks who proclaimed by their very presence in the wilderness that the Christian is not of this world, that the world passes and that the only thing that really matters is that which does not change with the passage of time10:31 PM. But the Christian, whether he likes it or not, is also of this world. Is it not his primordial vocation to live in this world, to try, with his brother men, to make it each day a better place to live in, more full of the glory of God, more overflowing with the joy of the Creator? Is it not his duty to work to transform gradually the historic structures so that the sap of the Gospel may be fully transmitted to them?[101]

Panikkar expresses the view that the true *jñānis* of modern India are not the silent *sadhus* sitting motionless in the depths of their caves, nor the *munis* [bound by a vow of silence] who live at Gangotri all winter. Rather, the true *jñānis* are the disciples of Gandhi or Vinoba Bhave who "utterly oblivious of themselves, wish to give their lives in service of their brothers."

Abhishiktānanda's response is that the monks, the naked silence acosmics in their caves, have entered their silence

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[98] Eric Lott: *Vedantic Approaches to God* (Harper and Row, 1980), p. 15.

[99] R.C. Zaehner: *Our Savage God: The Perverse Use of Eastern Thought* (NY: Sheed and Ward, 1974), p. 67, *cited by Stoeber, op. cit.*

[100] J.S. Krüger: *Along Edges*, p. 5.

[101] *Mountain of the Lord*, p. 160.

> …for the good of the world, turning to the solitude within, in the name of those whose attention is always riveted on what is outside themselves.[102]

He says that these silent acosmics are witnesses to the Absolute, just like the Himalayas, which are out of reach of ordinary humans. People need high and unattainable mountains. They look at the mountains and are influenced by them, without needing to climb them. Acosmics are like trees on the highest mountains whose slopes are protected by impassable gorges, that can never be used for construction work or for warmth. The monk must not yield to the "utilitarian temptation."

Panikkar gives more information about this discussion in his "Letter to Abhishiktānanda", written after Abhishiktānanda's death. In this article, Panikkar argues that absolute monasticism is not human and not Christian.

> I argued that, taken to its ultimate conclusions, *absolute* monasticism was not human and certainly not Christian. Not human, because monasticism has an inbuilt claim to, and an irresistible tendency toward, absolute acosmism. Monasticism seeks to break all boundaries, the limitations of the body, matter, and mind, as well as of the spirit: it aspires to transcend the human condition and become angelic under the guise of "divinisation" in Christianity, "realization" in Hinduism, and "nirvāna" in Buddhism. It is not Christian because such "perfect." completely logical and coherent monasticism stands in clear opposition to the Incarnation. Incarnation clearly stands for the divinisation of the concrete, the limited, and even of matter and the body, but without destruction of the latter, of the human, even of the corporeal.[103]

Panikkar argues that the trouble is Abhishiktānanda's lopsided insight, a vision of reality as being only *nirguṇa Brahman* to the exclusion of the cosmos. In Panikkar's view, the *advaitic* Absolute leaves no room for the world.

> What made you suffer was the radical existential dualism of the Advaitic distinction between *vyāvahārika* (the level of illusion and appearance) and *pāramārthika* (the level of reality and truth). On that latter level nothing of the first could enter. In the same way, a certain traditional monastic spirituality so stresses the transcendence or otherness of God that it demands from you, in order that you may reach the Absolute, a total dereliction of the relative, a complete annihilation of all that you are and can be, of all your creatureliness.[104]

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[102] *Mountain of the Lord*, p. 162.

[103] Panikkar: "A Letter to Abhishiktānanda", p. 444.

[104] Panikkar: "A Letter to Abhishiktānanda", p. 445.

Panikkar expresses the view that later in his life, Abhishiktānanda found an equilibrium between incarnation and transcendence, between extreme historicity (where time is an indispensable factor of eternity if not "the real thing" itself) and extreme acosmism (where time, space, matter, body are only obstacles, non-entities in the superior realm of the spirit):

> What you achieved is, to me, genuine Advaita: the dynamic overcoming of all *dvandvas* (dualisms) without falling into monism, the existential overcoming of separation (sin) without pantheistic reductionism; in other words: authentic redemption.

Panikkar says that the coming of his disciple Marc Chaduc made Abhishiktānanda revert to the "fervour" of the acosmic monk. He was ashamed of his laxness, and he returned to an uncompromising theoretical acosmism.

As we have seen, at the time of his awakening, Abhishiktānanda had a dream that seemed to indicate asceticism was not necessary to awakening.[105] It is unclear whether Abhishiktānanda would have given less emphasis to acosmism and asceticism had he lived longer.

C. Nondual Action and Sahaja

1. The *jīvanmukta*

The *sahaja* awareness is the life of the *jīvanmukta* who returns from the Pure Consciousness Experience and remains liberated in his or her body. Ramaṇa is an example of a *jīvanmukta*. As we have seen by Ramaṇa's response to issues concerning the suffering of the world, even this *sahaja* state is no guarantee of ethical action by the *jīvanmukta*. And yet this *sahaja* awareness is more likely to result in ethical action than *nirvikalpa samādhi* where there is no consciousness of anything.

According to Andrew Fort, the *Yoga Vāṣiṣtha* played a large role in popularizing the idea of the *jivanmukta*, the one who is liberated while still in a body.[106] Prior to this time, Hindu Advaitic thought was divided as to this possibility.

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[105] *Diary*, p. 386 (11.9.73).

[106] Andrew O. Fort: *Jīvanmukti in Transformation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), p. 85.

> …one sees a tension in Advaitic thought between the idea that all *mukti* is necessarily originally *jīvanmukti* because one becomes liberated (i.e., gains knowledge) only when in a body, with mind and senses, and the notion, consistent with the world-denying aspect of Advaita (in which one finds empirical experience regularly compared to an illusion, a dream, or an eye defect), that full liberation is only gained after death (sometimes, generally in Yogic Advaita, called *videhamukti*).[107]

Fort says that *Vedānta's* nondualism tends to devalue empirical reality, unlike the in-the-world monism of Tantra or of Kashmir Śaivism. There are many statements in Vedānta that bodiless liberation is superior to embodied *mukti.*

Fort finds two ideas of liberation in Vedānta. The first idea of liberation is knowledge of *Brahman/ātman*. The second is freedom from *saṃsāra*. He says that the second is a more negative idea of liberation; it generally requires some form of world renunciation or some kind of yogic practice. It ends in the perfect isolation (*kaivalya*) of the spirit. We may compare the idea of liberation from *saṃsāra* to *nirvikalpa samādhi*, which seeks liberation from consciousness and from awareness of all things. The other kind of liberation, knowledge of *Brahman/ātman,* is more compatible with what we have called a *sahaja* awareness.

In the *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha*, the liberated being is detached and indifferent. He or she appears always the same: constant, equable, impartial and even-minded, calm in all states of awareness, unchanging in joy and despair, as one who has lost all desire and anger. These liberated beings wander the world with detached minds whether they are rulers like Janaka or renouncers. Because the *jīvanmukti* does not act out of desire, there is no action in the karmic sense–no action that brings fruit. Even while acting, the *jīvanmukti* is not a doer. Unliberated people often do not recognize the *jīvanmukti* as liberated, because of this apparent worldliness.[108]

Abhishiktānanda does not refer to the *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha*. But he does make many references to the state of *jīvanmukti* and to the *sahaja* state. The *jīvanmukta* can take an interest in the world:

> Ramaṇa, for example, took his meals, was *interested* in food, its preparation, etc.
> I am afraid the idea that we make for ourselves of this (experience of) non-

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[107] *Ibid.* p. 6.

[108] *Ibid.* pp. 87, 88.

> awareness is [get word] is only ignorance that sees a difference between the jīvanmukta and the *other*.[109]

According to Abhishiktānanda, in the *sahaja* state there is a recovery of the world, or a return to the world.[110] In this return to the world, the world is seen in the light of the *atman*. The Self is "the backdrop against which all human and divine relationships are lived."[111] The Self is seen in all of our actions, even the most trivial.

> God is just as much in the making of a good soup or in the careful handling of a railway train, as he is in our most beautiful speculations.[112]

Even in our pain we may sense the presence of God.

> The Lord is everywhere and in everything. There is as much true prayer when the whole attention is concentrated on an ache, as in the marvellous silence when we think we are in ecstasy. What a wonderful lesson, it makes you rejoice in everything.[113]

He says that being awakened allows us to recover the state of communion [inter-relation] of the child before it has distinguished its 'I'.[114] Being awakened allows us to participate in life.

> The general mistake about Vedānta is to picture Vedantin life as something different, consisting of acts, attitudes, '*feelings*', that would be different from the acts, '*feelings*', attitudes of our so-called ordinary life. Most often people therefore picture an "acosmic" life. Whereas nothing changes or appears outwardly in the life of one who is realized. Jesus eats, drinks, weeps, gets tired. Poonja [Harilal] manages his mines. Janaka [a Hindu king] rules his kingdom. K.'s guru arranges the marriage of his children, etc. The realized person embraces his wife with as much love and joy as anyone else. Only, he is free, does not seek *himself*.[115]

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[109] *Letters*, p. 293 (MC, 12.4.73).

[110] *Saccidānanda*, p. 40, ft. 3.

[111] *Diary*, p. 356(11.6.72).

[112] (14.1.62). Letter to a Carmelite: Occasional Bulletin #9.

[113] *Letters*, p. 277 (MT 2.9.72).

[114] *Diary*, p. 312 (16.4.70).

[115] *Diary*, p. 321 (22.10.70).

One can therefore show emotion. The enlightened state is therefore no longer the same as stoicism. The awakened one can feel emotions like anguish, although one's deepest being is not affected.[116]

Abhishiktānanda believed that one action of importance in the *sahaja* state is to communicate the experience to others. This is how he experienced his own life after his heart attack–as a return to the world for the purpose of telling others. At Chaduc's *dīkshā* he also emphasized that Chaduc was to transmit the mystery. "All that has been given is received in order to be given anew."[117]

2. Beyond ego

It might be objected that looking to the fruits of one's action is opposed to any kind of disinterested or nondualistic action. If we are looking for the fruits of the action, then we must of necessity have some interest in the outcome. But a distinction can be made between action that is disinterested with respect to oneself, and action that has a positive effect on others. The criterion then becomes whether or not we are interested in the fruits for ourselves. Do we do the action out of ego? Or do we do it from a state of egolessness? The *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha* advises abandoning the aspect of the mind called the "I" notion, *ahamkāra*, *ahambhāva*.[118] Ramaṇa says, "What you have to renounce is the *I*, not any particular state of life."[119]

Loy sees the lack of ego in the nondual experience as the basis for ethical action. Nonduality, in denying an ego-self, eliminates the basis of selfishness. The realized person therefore acts appropriately. The "appropriate" choice of action arises quite spontaneously from what is normally called the subconscious.[120]

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[116] Jésus le Sauveur" (1971), *Intériorité*, p. 289.

[117] Odette Baumer-Despeigne: "The Spiritual Way of Henri Le Saux Swami Abhishiktānanda", *Bulletin of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue*, 1993, vol. 48, Oct., p. 24.

[118] Fort, *op. cit.* p. 92.

[119] *Secret*, p. 74.

[120] *Nonduality*, p. 131.

Abhishiktānanda also sees the basis for ethical action in acting without ego. The *jñāni* will always act well because there is no egoism.[121]

> Do everything, act in everything without "mine", without ego [*nirmamo nirahamkāra*].[122]
>
> The work of yoga consists essentially in clearing the ground, in creating a vacuum, in curbing and ejecting the ego [*ahamkāra*] from even its last hiding places where it is wrongfully taking up room.[123]

If the ego is wrongfully taking up room, does this mean that it is something that exists separately from the Self? This is the issue of the problem of evil. If ego is the cause of so much suffering, how does this ego arise?

> Evil only emerges when what is true, beautiful or good stops short at itself, claiming to be the All, the final plenitude, and refuses the role in the history of salvation which is the very purpose of its creation.[124]

Thus, it is when our ego claims to be independent that evil arises. There is a choice between self-surrender to divine grace and the decision to retain forever one's proud independence.[125] In fact, the ego is not separate from the Self; it is the Self in limited form.

> I should not think of my superficial ego [*ahamkāram*] as different from the *ātman*, but the former should disappear in order to leave all the space in my consciousness for the latter. My superficial ego is not other than the *ātman* itself. (Indeed, is there anything else than the *ātman*, one without a second [*ekam eva advitīyam*]? It [the superficial ego] is the *ātman* in a limited form. To reach the *ātman* precisely within this ego is simply to remove the limits of the ego, to release the ego from its connection with the *deha* [body]–including, of course, the *manas* [mind] and the *buddhi* [intellect]. For the one who has realized the Self, this *deha* is no more interesting than all the other *dehas* that people the universe. It is simply one among the others. The *aham* is the superficial ego liberated from the *upādhis* [superimposed limitations] of *idam* and *kālam*, of space-time. This

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[121] *Guru*, p. 87.

[122] *Diary*, p. 385 (8.7.73).

[123] *Diary* , p. 182 (28.11.56).

[124] *Meeting Point,* p. 98.

[125] *Meeting Point,* p. 102.

> means regarding one's own "deha" from the viewpoint of eternity [*sub specie aeternitatis*], of the eternal *nunc* [Now].[126]

Acting without ego therefore does not mean doing away with it, but rather removing the limits of our ego. The ego should not be seen as solely connected with our individual body [*deha*]. The true Self is trans-personal. The suggestion that the true Self is beyond space and time does suggest that Abhishiktānanda is thinking in terms of two levels of reality, the temporal and the eternal. We remove the limits of our ego when we recognize the eternal Self.

Acting without ego is also called acting "without attachment". This is acting without relating things and other people to our individual desires. So long as you seek you own ends while pretending to seek God, you will never find God.[127]

> Things are seen in themselves and no longer in dependence on "himself." Dear ones are no less loved, but there is no longer the least attachment.[128]

Abhishiktānanda refers to the Buddhist idea of desire and attachment as the cause of our suffering:

> Was not the Buddha right to require simply the letting go of all desire? There is no direct way to the mystery, the only way there is to renounce every way.[129]

The realized person does not judge anyone or compare himself with anyone. He or she has left behind all sense of difference, and is not "above" or "below" anyone else.[130]

3. Beyond good and evil

The Hindu tradition says that the *sannyāsī* is beyond morality and beyond good and evil. The *sannyāsī* has renounced all rights, and also has freedom from all obligations. He or she is therefore not bound to any morality or moral codes.[131] Abhishiktānanda sometimes writes of the *sannyāsin* in these traditional terms, of being beyond good and evil.

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[126] *Diary*, p. 42 (3.6.52).

[127] *Letters*, p. 131 (MT.21.8.60).

[128] *Diary*, p. 50 (19.7.52).

[129] *Diary*, p. 270 (12.4.64).

[130] "Sannyasa", *Further Shore*, p. 7.

[131] *Nonduality*, p. 297. Loy makes this point for the nondual traditions in general.

> How can one who has realized that 'he is', once more feel himself bound?[132]

Abhishiktānanda says that the *keshi* (ascetic) does not have to give any reason for what he does.[133]

> As long as the *dvandva* of ought/ought-not subsists, the level of freedom has not been reached.[134]

Sannyāsa involves withdrawal from society, and from social and religious obligations. The *sannyāsī* transcends all the yokes of *māyā*, all rights as well as all obligations.[135] *Pūjā*, *japa*, rites, litanies, and the rest all belong to the world of appearances and have nothing to do with the Real.[136] Sometimes the *sannyāsī* will perform those rituals for the sake of others.[137]

Abhishiktānanda compares the *sannyāsī to* John the Baptist and to Jesus, who also ignored conventional morality of their time:

> And no one may call for any explanation from the *jñānī*…John the Baptist lived as a *keshi* [ascetic]. Jesus ate, drank, loved his friends, allowed women to anoint his head and embrace his feet, took John to his breast…the freedom of the Spirit.[138]

Liberation is to overcome all conditioning, to be free and sovereign, *samrat*, unmovable, *acala*, stable, *akshara*, amidst the continual flow of external happenings, mental phenomena and human pressures.[139]

Abhishiktānanda surprised some of his Western visitors by announcing that he did not know either evil or suffering.[140] But despite his statements that the *sannyāsī is* not bound by social conventions and morality, Abhishiktānanda did not consistently act in this way. After his heart attack, he was found lying on the sidewalk of Rishikesh by Yvonne Lemoine. She was a nurse and she tried to take his pulse. Abhishiktānanda waved her away. He did not want others

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[132] *Letters*, pp. 118-119 (L, 3.6.59).

[133] *Diary*, p. 380 (4.5.73).

[134] *Diary*, p. 337 (24.12.71).

[135] *Diary*, p. 88 (7.1.54).

[136] *Guru*, p. 71.

[137] *Guru*, p. 72.

[138] *Letters*, p. 296 (MC, 23.4.73).

[139] Abhishiktānanda: "Communication in the Spirit" *Religion and Society* Vol. XVII, NO. 3, 1970, p. 5

[140] Recollection of Mrs. Stokes, cited, *Letters*, p. 288.

to see that a woman had touched a *sannyāsī*.[141] It is therefore evident that Abhishiktānanda believed that some conventions remained, even for the *sannyāsī*.

One explanation for this view may be Abhishiktānanda's distinction between institutional and other *sannyāsīs*. He says that Hindu monasticism is between two poles: that of total freedom, exemplified by the *avadhūta*, those for whom the inner light, the *tejas* is too strong to allow them to accept any social or religious obligation whatever (like Ramaṇa) and that of institutional *sannyās*a, which evolved on parallel lines in Hinduism and Buddhism.[142] And yet Abhishiktānanda did not consider himself as a member of any institution of *sannyāsins*. Why should he have cared what others thought of him?

In fact, Abhishiktānanda continued to believe in the importance of ethical action in society, even for the liberated person. And it is clear that he thought of those ethics in Christian terms.

> The way of the Lord Jesus, *mukunda yoga* [salvation-giving yoga], consists of doing one's daily duty with loving attention to his heavenly Father, in forgetfulness of oneself, before God, before other people, before oneself. […] A coming of Christ which is linked neither to ecstasy nor to *samādhi* [enstasy]. The way of Christ is the *sahaja* way ["natural," innate, simple], "to have passed over into God" while living in the midst of this world.[143]

These ethics are specifically linked with the *sahaja* state of awareness, and not that of *nirvikalpa samādhi*. In this *sahaja* state, there is a forgetfulness of oneself, or loss of ego.

> This does not mean that the *sannyāsī* will spend his time in meditation, in *samādhi*, as is so often mistakenly asserted. As Ramana Maharshi pointed out, the highest form of *samādhi* is *sahaja samādhi*, that which is completely natural (literally, 'innate'). In this there is no restraint of a man's normal bodily and mental awareness, as in ecstasy (*nirvikalpa samādhi*), which itself implies a dualism; rather the *jñāni* continues to be fully aware of himself and of all around him, but within the indivisible awareness of the *ātman*. Thus the prayer of the *sannyāsī*, no less than his life, is not a matter of doing, but of *being*.[144]

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[141] Vandana: "A messenger of ligh", *Clergy Monthly*, December, 1974, p. 499.

[142] "The Upanishads, an Introduction", *Further Shore*, p. 81.

[143] *Diary*, p. 61 (26.2.52).

[144] *Further Shore,* p. 11.

The "being" that Abhishiktānanda refers to here is different from the sense of being achieved in *nirvikalpa samādhi*.

Abhishiktānanda says that it is Christian ethics that would continue for him after liberation:

> Realization of *a-dvaita*–I do not say monism–could not free me from my Christian duties, for my *prārabdha* is linked with that of all my brothers. My baptism is a true vow of *bodhisattva*, for it obliges me not only to be saved in Christ, but in and through Christ to save all my brothers, and to attain my fullness only on the last day. There is no absolute liberation [*mukti*] except in the universal *mukti*.[145]

This justification of Christian ethics by Abhishiktānanda is especially interesting because he combines ideas from Hindu, Buddhist and Christian traditions. First, he is speaking of an *advaitic* liberation in Christian terms. He emphasizes that it is *advaitic*, but not monistic. Second, he refers to *prārabdha*, his past *karma*, as a reason for the continuance of his Christian duties. This is an unusual use of the term *prārabdha*. It normally explains how one can remain in the body after liberation. It therefore explains one's physical continuance in the body. I am not aware of this term being used as a justification for the continuance of one's morality prior to realization. This usage is contrary to the normal teachings concerning the *jīvanmukta's* freedom from all obligations. Furthermore, Abhishiktānanda applies this Hindu idea of past *karma* to his status after salvation in Christ.

An additional rationale that Abhishiktānanda gives for continuing his Christian duties is the Buddhist rationale of the *bodhisattva.* The *bodhisattva* refuses to enter *nirvana* until all beings have been liberated. He applies this idea to his salvation in Christ.

Further justification for the continuance of Christian ethics is found in a letter to Chaduc:

> The *abhayam* [absence of fear], extended to all creatures, goes infinitely further than not killing a fly, as soon as you think of its application to men in all circumstances, in every meeting. To insist on solitude [*esseulement*], on non-relatedness, on avoiding friendship, runs the risk of being negative. To refuse the total gift of yourself to others means refusing to be yourself. It is in giving that you become yourself–once more the marvellous *muthos* [myth] of the Trinity.[146]

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[145] *Diary*, p. 50 (17.6.52).

[146] *Letters*, pp. 291, 292 (MC 8.4.73).

This rationale for ethics is founded on Abhishiktānanda's non-monistic *advaita*. There is an exchange of love between the enlightened person and the other. There still is a distinction between them, but they are not-two. He relates this to the way God sheds his love everywhere "when passing through time without leaving his eternity" and "without leaving his solitude." As he says elsewhere, we, like God, are both One and Other.[147]

The tension towards our fellow humans comes because we are different from these others and yet we are one with them. The basis for this non-monistic *advaita* can be found Abhishiktānanda's trinitarianism, which will be discussed in a later chapter of this thesis. It is clear, however, that this trinitarianism is the basis for Abhishiktānanda's non-monistic *advaitic* ethics:

> Christian experience is really the experience of advaita lived out in human communion. And that is what the Trinity is.[148]

Abhishiktānanda says that, while working inwardly at the level of the *sahaja*, each of us has an outward mission to fulfil in the world at the level of society.[149] Where did Abhishiktānanda get this idea of "mission"? Fort argues that this is a recent and Western-influenced phenomenon, although there is some mention of these ethics in Yogic Advaita texts.[150] He says that modern *advaitins* (neo-Hinduism) claim that the *jīvanmukti* is beyond morality and that no good actions are necessary. But they also claim that the *jīvanmukti* will do good and show social concern.

Abhishiktānanda does not make many statements about what should be done in society. He does say that a society based on profit and egoism is contrary to the Gospel.[151] We should use everything as if it were loaned to us.[152] The Church ought to appear in the world like the seventy-two disciples sent out by Jesus.[153] These are the ethics of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

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[147] Abhishiktānanda: "Foi, sens d'au-delà" (unpublished, 27.06.71).

[148] *Diary*, p. 358 (3.8.72).

[149] *Diary*, p. 122, (3.9.55).

[150] Fort, *op. cit.* p. 13. See the earlier discussion regarding Hacker's views.

[151] *Letters*, p. 169 (MT, 13.4.65).

[152] *Diary*, p. 383 (5.7.73).

[153] *Letters*, pp. 170, 171 (MT, 13.4.65).

Abhishiktānanda thought the people in India who most followed those ethics were a Quaker family, as well as a Hindu family that ran a leper colony.[154] He also says that the disciples of Gandhi and Vinoba Bhave often shame Christians by the serious way they take Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.[155]

It is interesting that Abhishiktānanda continues to place his ethical obligations in a Christian context:

> Advent is the cry of the poor, humiliated and frustrated, who are waiting for me, the Christian to come to their help.[156]

In the last year of his life, Abhishiktānanda wrote to Chaduc about the teaching of Jesus–"a union of mutual giving without limit." This self-giving provides a greater truth than Vedāntin speculations:

> And in the absoluteness of their self-giving to God and the neighbour, the non-dual Absolute is found and lived with far greater truth than in Vedantin speculations.[157]

He says that Jesus gives no teaching of meditation or yoga. The only way to awakening is love, which release us from the limitations of ego and throws us into the arms of God and our brothers.[158] The yoga of Jesus is *koinonia* or community.[159] Abhishiktānanda contrasts these Christian ethics with Hinduism, especially insofar as Christian ethics sometimes involve taking on the suffering of the world:

> Neither Shiva nor Krishna nor Rāma suffer for their brothers, and neither human suffering nor human sin are taken seriously. They are something that one has to pass beyond rather than to shoulder. In Christian thought, evil and sin are means of salvation. The disciple of Jesus takes part in the suffering of the world, is *involved*' in it.[160]

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[154] *Letters*, p. 170 (MT, 17.12.64).

[155] Abhishiktānanda: "India and the Carmelite Order" (1964), *Eyes of Light*, p. 71.

[156] *Letters*, p. 240 (TL 14.12.70).

[157] *Letters*, p. 294 (MC, 12.4.73).

[158] *Saccidānanda*, p. 200.

[159] "Jésus le Sauveur" (1970) *Intériorité* p. 290.

[160] *Diary*, p. 341 (31.3.72).

However, Abhishiktānanda does also base his ethics on the finding of the same Self within each person. This will now be discussed in more detail.

4. Presence of the Self in Others

Abhishiktānanda says that it is in seeing the Self in all things that we find the basis for *ahimsā* (non-violence) and for the *jīva-karunā*, the benevolence towards each living thing. This is the basis for charity. Christ's commandments to love our neighbour as ourself, and to love each other as He has loved us, receive an unsuspected depth of sense in *advaita*. We are to love our neighbour as ourself because in a deep sense our neighbour is our Self.[161] We should "see all things as the Self."[162]

The basis for ethics is therefore to feel all beings to be oneself. Abhishiktānanda expresses this view in 1952 while meditating in the caves of Arunāchala:

> Dive down into myself, to the greatest depth of myself. Forget my own "*aham*", lose myself in the "*aham*" of the divine *Ātman* who is at the origin of my being, of my consciousness of being. And in this unique–or primordial–Aham feel all beings to be oneself. There you have the source of *ahimsā*, *karunā*, etc.[163]

Abhishiktānanda finds the basis for our ethical actions towards others in this doctrine of the Self in others. Can it also be the basis for justifying how those others act towards me? Abhishiktānanda discusses this:

> If anyone abuses me, etc., it means that since he is me, he knows my sins and treats me accordingly. It is my sins and not the malice of the other person that are involved when someone is hard on me.[164]

This view of our suffering is difficult to understand. What happens to me may be a result of my *karma*. But does that excuse the actions of the other towards me? That does not seem to follow.

Abhishiktānanda says that my neighbour is in a deep sense not-other to me:

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[161] *"Cheminements intérieurs"* Intériorité, p. 44, The term *karunā* is often used in Buddhism to mean 'compassion.' Gnānānanda also spoke of *ahimsā* and compassion towards all creatures. *Sadguru*, p. 236.

[162] *Diary*, p. 161 (14.11.56), citing *Brihadāranyaka Upanishad* IV, 4,23.

[163] *Diary*, p. 35 (5.4.52).

[164] *Diary*, p. 277 (9.2.65).

> An authentic philosophical or theological reflection on the *other* can only begin from the experience of relationship at the very level of the experience of the not-other. It is at the same depth of my own experience of Myself that I discover the Myself of the one with whom I am in a reciprocal relationship as Thou.[165]

Abhishiktānanda emphasizes that when he speaks of seeing the Self in others, this does not mean that it is his own individual self that he sees there:

> To feel all beings as mine, to "feel" myself the Self of all beings, does not mean feeling them as belonging to the individual born in Brittany on 30-8-1910 and currently seated in a cave at Arunāchala. This superficial I, all illusion [*māyā*], in this case has no importance.[166]

Seeing the Self in others does not mean that I incorporate the phenomenal 'I' of others into my own phenomenal 'I'. Nor is it an inflation of myself to the dimension of "all this" [*sarvam idam*], i.e. the universe. Such wrong ideas are the result of the reflection of the mind [*manas*] on the spontaneous experience of *an-anya* [not other]. An example of this reflection on the experience is the philosophical technicality that Shankara has wrongly superimposed on the Upanishads.[167]

Seeing the Self in others does not mean imagining that I am these others. There is no imaginative transposition or mere empathy. The finding of Self in others is a reality that wells up.[168] We are all inter-related and connected. All beings are nourishment for each other, *annam-madhu*.[169]

Loy also sees our inter-relatedness as the basis for ethical behaviour:

> When my sense-of-self lets go and disappears, I realize my interdependence with all other phenomena in that all-encompassing net. It is more than being dependent on them: When I discover I *am* you, the trace of your traces, the ethical problem of how to relate to you is transformed. We do not need a moral code to tie us together if we are not separate from each other.[170]

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[165] *Diary*, p. 375 (16.4.73).

[166] *Diary*, p. 35 (5.4.52).

[167] *Diary*, p. 375 (4.16.73).

[168] *Diary*, p. 36 (5.4.52). See also *"Cheminements intérieurs"* Intériorité, p. 47.

[169] *Letters*, p. 292 (MC 8.4.73).

[170] David Loy: *Lack and Transcendence: The Problem of Death and Life in Psychotherapy, Existentialism, and Buddhism* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1996), pp. 107-108. The "net" referred to is Indra's Net.

Abhishiktānanda writes about the non-distinction between self and other in a poem:

> There is I myself [*aham*]
> there is not-myself *nāham*, the other [*anyah*];
> there is the fact that I and not-I are *a-dvaita* [non-dual],
> the being-together [*samsat*] of humanity, of being.[171]

We discover our unity with others by in symbols. Ultimately these symbols are inadequate. We only really discover our unity with others when we discover this mystery of *advaita*:

> Human beings realize their togetherness when beyond their community–natural, bodily, mental–they discover the mystery of the *advaita* of their consciousness, '*awareness*'.[172]

Abhishiktānanda often quoted verse 6 of the Iśa Upanishad in connection with the manifestation of Self in everyone as the basis for ethics:

> …according to the Īśa Upanishad, he who sees all things in the Self (*ātman*) and the Self in all things, does not shrink back or run away from anything. It is impossible for him to esteem more highly the 'manifestation' of the *ātman*, the unique Self, in his own body and mind than the 'manifestation' of the same unique Self in the body and mind of anyone else.[173]

By seeing the *ātman* in all things, we are serving God when we serve our neighbour.[174] In the perspective of Jesus, one's neighbour and God are not different (*advaita*).[175] Our service of humanity is the service of God himself in that special manifestation of him through which he is calling for our loving service.[176] It is not for love of his wife that the husband loves her but for love of the Self.[177]

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[171] *Diary*, p. 289 (23.11.66).

[172] *Diary*, p. 372 (17.2.73).

[173] *Saccidānanda,* p. 158.

[174] *Diary*, p. 153 (28.7.56).

[175] "Jésus le Sauveur" (1971), *Intériorité*, p. 288.

[176] "An Approach to Hindu Spirituality", *Clergy Review* (1969) LIV, No. 3., p. 168. Abhishiktānanda cites *Brihadāranyaka Upanishad* II, 4 in support of this idea.

[177] "*Ehieh Asher Ehieh*" Intériorité, p. 89. This raises the issue, discussed *infra*, does loving God negate the husband's love for the wife?

Is Abhishiktānanda correct that Hinduism contains the basis for ethical action in its idea of the Self being the same in others as ourselves? This is certainly a doctrine of neo-Hinduism. Aurobindo for example says that friends and enemies are only diverse modes of divine essence, the same in him and each of them at the base of the Universe and beyond the universe.[178]

This basing of ethics on our *advaitic* non-difference with others was started within neo-Hinduism by Vivekānanda's "Practical Vedānta".[179] Practical Vedānta used the principles of *advaita* in a practical way to achieve moral results. This was the basis of the Ramakrishna Mission that he founded. In support of this Practical Vedanta, Vivekānanda referred to the *mahavakya* (great saying) *tat tvam asi* in the Upanishads. If we are identical with the other and with *Brahman*, then we will want to "do good" to the other. This *mahavakya* is therefore the foundation for morality. It is not that we do good to our neighbour out of altruism, but because the neighbour is identical to ourself.

Hacker has written extensively about the sources for this teaching of Vivekānanda.[180] In Hacker's view, the sources are distinctly Western–the German philosopher Schopenhauer and Schopenhauer's student, Paul Deussen. Schopenhauer studied the Upanishads, and wrote specifically about *tat tvam asi* as the basis for morality. Because of Schopenhauer's world-denying philosophy, he himself did not advocate this morality. Deussen took the principle further and actually advocated it as the basis for how we should act. Deussen gave a lecture in Bombay on February 25, 1893 concerning the *tat tvam asi* theory of the foundation of ethics. He went again to India in 1896 and there met Vivekānanda. Hacker says it is not until after this meeting that Vivekānanda's writings included the principle as a basis for ethics. Prior to this time, Vivekānanda's ethics were based on the idea of disinterested action. In fact, in his book *Karma-Yoga* Vivekānanda said that it was foolish talk to speak of doing good to the world.[181]

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[178] Monchanin comments on these ethics of Aurobindo. See *Jules Monchanin: Mystique de l'Inde, mystere chretien*, ed. Suzanne Siauve (Paris: Fayard, 1974) p. 302.

[179] Vivekānanda: *Practical Vedānta* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashram, 1978).

[180] Paul Hacker: "Schopenhauer and Hindu Ethics", P*hilology and Confrontation: Paul Hacker on Traditional and Modern Vedānta*. ed. Wilhelm Halbfass (State University of New York Press, 1995), pp. 273-318.

[181] Wilhelm Halbfass: "Neo-Hinduism and Modern Indian Traditionalism", *India and Europe*: *An Essay in Understanding* (State University of New York Press, 1988), p. 240.

Hacker says that this is a great change from traditional Hinduism. Prior to Western thought (Schopenhauer), Vedāntic nondualism was not applied in an ethical sense. Traditional *advaita* is concerned with renunciation and asceticism. The world, all difference and diversity, all action and all psychic phenomena are ultimately unreal. The sole reality is *Brahman.*

Hacker says that passages from the Hindu scriptures such as "loving one's husband because of the Self in the husband" amount to an egoism of the Ultimate, and are not really the same as the compassion towards others as others, which he sees developed in Vivekānanda's Ramakrishna Mission. If love of neighbour is love of self, it is questionable whether we could talk of ethics, since ethics presuppose relationships.[182] Relations between persons cannot be reduced to an egoism of the universal One.[183] The *Gītā's* admonition to avoid greed is only because greed makes contemplation impossible.[184] Hacker does acknowledge that there is a panentheistic basis for morality that appears in the *Bhagavad Gītā.* For example, chapter 13 speaks of "not harming the self by the self."[185] Other parts of the *Bhagavad Gītā* speak of seeing the Self in all things. But Hacker says that this is not the same as the identity *tat tvam asi* being the basis for morality to the 'other'. The reason the yogin sees the Self in all beings is because he sees and worships God in all things, not because he acknowledges an other.

Further evidence that this doctrine is a change from classical or traditional Hinduism is that even other Hindu thinkers like Debendranath Tagore and Dayananda rejected Sankara's *advaita*. The basis for their rejection was that they believed that *advaita* was contrary to proper morality. Thus, they did not see *tat tvam asi* as the basis for morality at all.

Vivekānanda's Practical Vedānta, and "doing good" are very different from Ramakrishna's own ideas. Ramakrishna's emphasis was almost entirely on meditation and devotion; he said that the world does not need our help. That would seem to be the traditional *advaitic* view. It is also related to traditional ideas of *dharma* as following the duties in one's caste, and doing one's ritual duties, without regard for those in other castes.

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[182] Hacker, *op. cit.* p. 277.

[183] Hacker, *op. cit.* p. 306. He says that this was recognized by the Hindu thinker P.T. Raju. Ethics demand an I and Thou, not an I and That.

[184] Hacker, *op. cit.* p. 282. Cites *Bhagavad Gītā* 16,21.

It therefore is quite likely that the *tat tvam asi* theory of ethics, which influenced Abhishiktānanda, is not a doctrine from traditional Hinduism but is in fact itself reflective of Western and Christian ideas. Halbfass however points out that, as a follower of Ramakrishna, Vivekānanda had also been exposed to non-traditional *advaitic* sources, such as the *Yoga Vāṣiṣtha*.[186] He says that this may also have contributed to the change in Vivekānanda's writings on morality. The *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* might be another such source. Verse 37 says that those who have attained nondual realization are inherently beneficial "just as the spring season." Halbfass says that the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* echoes Mahayana Buddhist ideas of compassion.[187]

But Hacker says that the *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha* does not lead to the ethical attitude of compassion. It leads only to the ascetic attitude of freedom from feelings of friendship or enmity.[188] He does acknowledge a 17th century commentary on the *Bhagavad Gītā*s interpreting "not to harm the self" in terms of having compassion for all.[189]

As for the doctrine of *ahimsā*ˆ, Hacker says that this was never a norm for political action until Gandhi. *Ahimsā* is an ancient Indian ideal in the negative meaning of abstention from killing or injuring living beings; it does not have the positive meaning of goodwill toward all life and the Christian ideals of love of neighbour and enemy. Gandhi learned those ideas through Tolstoy's interpretation of the Gospels. Gandhi also extended the meaning of the word *ahimsā* to include selflessness.[190]

5. Actionless Action

Loy says that Nondual action is spontaneous (because free from objectified intention), effortless (because free from a reified "I" that must exert itself), and "empty" (because one

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[185] Hacker, *op. cit.* p. 280 , citing *Bhagavad Gītā* 13,27-28; also 6,20.

[186] Halbfass: *op. cit.* pp. 229, 240.

[187] Wilhelm Halbfass, "Homo Hierarchicus: The Conceptualization of the Varna System in Indian Thought", *Tradition and Reflection: Explorations in Indian Thought* (State University of New York Press, 1991). p. 394 ft. 29.

[188] Hacker, *op. cit.* p. 312 ft. 43.

[189] Hacker, *op. cit.* p. 286.

[190] Paul Hacker: "Aspects of Neo-Hinduism as contrasted with Surviving Traditional Hinduism", P*hilology and Confrontation: Paul Hacker on Traditional and Modern Vedānta*. ed. Wilhelm Halbfass (State University of New York Press, 1995), pp. 242, 243.

wholly is the action, there is not the dualistic awareness of an action).[191] In nondual action we act without intentions as to the fruits of our actions. Intentions are superimposed thoughts.[192] Intention is manipulating the world; it is seeing and using objects as utensils.[193]

Nondual action is similar to the idea of *wu-wei*, the action of nonaction of Taoism. Abhishiktānanda refers to the idea in this sense.[194] There are many interpretations of *wu-wei;* Loy understands it to mean actions where there is no self-consciousness. It is acting with "no-mind" in the way a *Bodhisattva* works, without making effort, and doing nothing.[195] The *Bhagavad Gītā* speaks of the action of nonaction, and of acting without attachment.[196] Abhishiktānanda sometimes quotes the Bhagavad *Gītā*'s emphasis on acting without desire.[197] We should do nothing with attachment, even celebrating the Mass.[198] To perform the ritual with attachment would be looking to it for spiritual consolation.

Abhishiktānanda also writes about *wu-wei*.

> *Wou-wei.* The Ganges does not flow in order to irrigate. It does not seek to irrigate, to fertilize; it just flows […] stop thinking, stop acting, let the Ganges flow.[199]

Abhishiktānanda says that when we act in this way, we are to ready for anything, because we are not preparing ourselves for anything. We are free of all complexes that hinder the free flight of the psyche, as in psychoanalysis.[200]

Abhishiktānanda's reference to psychoanalysis in reference to nondual action is echoed by Loy, who says that the action that is "appropriate" will arise from what is normally called our "subconscious." [201]

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[191] *Nonduality*, p. 10.

[192] *Nonduality*, p. 107.

[193] *Nonduality*, p. 121.

[194] *Diary*, p. 312 (16.4.70).

[195] *Nonduality*, p. 104.

[196] *Bhagavad Gītā* 4,18-20.

[197] "Cheminements Intérieurs", *Intériorité*, p. 78. *Bhagavad Gītā* 17,11.

[198] *Diary*, p. 126 (18.9.55).

[199] *Diary*, p. 312 (16.4.70).

Loy compares acting without intention to an aesthetic experience. An aesthetic experience is unintentional; I only look at the *what* in the art. By seeing this art "I" am transformed[202] When we act without intention, there is wonder in our experience.[203]

Abhishiktānanda speaks of the self of the *jīvanmukta* as "pure *élan,* spontaneity."[204] The decisions of the *jñāni* are seldom hampered by long periods of reflection. He or she acts on he inspiration of the moment.[205] Actions take place by an effort that is not forced, a tension that is not strained.[206] The action of the *jñāni* is like the play or *līlā* of God:

> Deeper than any conscious awareness he may have of it, the *jñāni* wonderfully reflects in himself, as in a mirror that nothing can now dull the very mystery of being, the mystery of self, the mystery of God; and the Spirit, now given free play, realizes through him in the world the secret works known to Him alone.[207]

The *jñāni* does not withdraw from the world, but rather enters the world of human activity. The *jñāni* enters fully into the Lord's 'play' (*līlā*)."[208] Thus the temporal world continues to be important. It is not just an illusion or *māyā* which is only to be escaped. The world becomes instead the world of *śakti*, divine energy. The yogi is as much with God in the song of the *līlā* as in the song of the *kevala* [total solitude].[209]

Our actions are the actions not of our ego, but of Self. It is as if God acts through us:

> Westerners cannot get it into their heads that it is the Lord who acts in all they do. It is Īśvara who takes delight in eating, as the eater, and who takes delight in being eaten, as the food. This is the deep meaning of the Aitareya Upanishad.[210]

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200 *Diary*, p. 321 (22.10.69).

201 *Nonduality*, p. 131.

202 *Nonduality*, pp. 298. 299.

203 *Nonduality*, p. 118.

204 *Diary*, p. 298 (22.5.68).

205 *Guru*, p. 29.

206 *Diary*, p. 163 (15.11.56).

207 *Guru*, p. 84.

208 *Saccidānanda*p. 157.

209 *Diary*, p. 45 (8.6.52).

210 *Diary*, p. 39 (1.6.52).

God is himself the Knower and the Enjoyer which my ego pretends to be, and at the same time the Known and the object of enjoyment of this pseudo-subject.[211]

These decisions of God do not come from some source from outside us, but from the very source of our being.

> But the true voice of the Lord does not make itself heard (…) as something other (a different voice with which our mind is confronted) but it is so far embodied in us (…) that the decision which the Lord inspires springs from the very depth of our "one" being.[212]

In our actions, we play a role, like an actor on a stage:

> Is it not all *līlā,* the Lord's play simply on the level of manifestation? Whoever truly knows this, plays his role in the world with the same responsibility as an actor does on the stage; yet, no more than the actor, can he ever forget his real identity, that identity which was revealed to him in the experience of the self.[213]

To reach this stage of spontaneous play, we must give up our planning and anxiety, and the fear about what is going to happen to us.[214]

6. Nature

We have seen how Abhishiktānanda's ethics towards other persons are dependent on his seeing the Self in others. Does this same ethic apply to how we deal with nature?

Loy says that the future of the biosphere depends on an *advaitic* ethics.[215] He refers to the *Gītā*, which admonishes one to act with a view to maintenance of the world.[216]

Abhishiktānanda does not have any extensive discussion on our relation with nature as a

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[211] *Diary*, p. 41 (2.6.52).

[212] *Letters*, p. 234 (TL, 17.9.70).

[213] *Saccidānanda*, p. 26. Boehme also spoke of life as play. *Nonduality*, p. 111.

[214] *Diary* , p. 130 (16.11.55).

[215] *Nonduality* p. 304. Many other writers have written on the topic of "deep ecology", beginning with the philosopher Arne Naess in the 1970's. See Ken Wilber: *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality* (Boston: Shambhala, 1995). Also Fred Eppsteiner, ed.: *The Path of Compassion: Writings on Socially Engaged Buddhism* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1985). From a Jungian perspective, see C.A. Meier: *A Testament to the Wilderness* (Daimon Verlag, Zurich, 1985). Two recent books that I have not read but which appear to be relevant are: Katx, Light and Rothenberg, (eds.) *Beneath the Surface. Critical Essays in the Philosophy of Deep Ecology* (MIT, 2000). David Landis Barnhill: *Deep Ecology and World Religions* (State University of New York Press, 2001).

[216] *Bhagavad Gītā* 2, 9, cited in *Nonduality*, p. 281.

way of reforming ecology. This is understandable in view of the fact that these ecological issues did not really become prominent until after his death. Nevertheless, we can find some indications in Abhishiktānanda's writings of the importance of relating to nature.

Abhishiktānanda says that the *jñāni* takes the same pleasure in nature, even more than before enlightenment, since the pleasures are now pure, unmixed with egoism.[217] He himself expresses some of that enjoyment:

> It is a marvelous meditation just to watch the little calf frisking about. In that way you become simple; and only in hearts become simple and entirely open can the Holy Spirit act freely.[218]

And

> Every act performed by any creature, every movement of unconscious or inanimate creatures is a divine act, as much as the divine generation itself. God is completely and totally present in each of his manifestations (just as Christ is in every host and in every particle of the host).[219]

Sometimes Abhishiktānanda refers either directly or indirectly to the Buddhist idea of the *bodhisattva*:

> But salvation is not an individualistic concern. Salvation is only complete when it is shared with the whole universe, for there is only on Spirit, whose unity sustains all things in being.[220]

Abhishiktānanda does not spell out how our salvation can be shared with the whole universe, or how we can have a greater ecological awareness. But his ideas of connection with others and with nature provide a basis for these ideas.

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[217] *Diary*, p. 321 (22.10.70).

[218] *Letters*, p. 155 (MT 101.10.63).

[219] *Diary*, p. 40 (1.6.52).

[220] *Meeting Point,* p. 122.

VIII. Phenomena and the Absolute

The relation of the One and the Many is a recurring problem in philosophy. Is there a unity that is somehow beyond the diverse phenomena of the world? Or do only the many particulars exist, which we then organize into unity by means of classes and similarities?

Loy discusses the problem of the One and the Many in terms of two related senses of nonduality. One of these senses of nonduality is the nonplurality of the world. All things "in" the world are not really distinct. Instead, they together constitute some integral whole. Each separate thing is a manifestation of a "spiritual" whole. This spiritual whole may be called "One Mind", "the Tao", or "*Brahman*", depending on the tradition.[1] I will discuss this sense of nonduality in terms of 'emanation' from the One.

Another sense of nonduality in relation to the One and the Many is the nondifference or "identity" between the Absolute and phenomena. I will discuss this sense of nonduality in terms of 'levels of reality.' To understand this sense of nonduality, we need to compare this sense of nonduality with Vedānta's solution to the problem. According to Vedānta, there is only *Brahman*; the phenomena of the world are *māyā* and merely obscure our view of this One Reality. Taken to its logical extreme, this is a monistic view of reality that denies any reality to particulars. Loy says that such a belief in a monistic "ground" underlying phenomena sets up a new dualism, between the duality of phenomena and the nonduality of the One.[2]

Loy proposes the Mahāyāna Buddhist solution that phenomena are manifestations of Mind (which he regards as Emptiness).[3] Loy says that this is what is meant by the Mahāyāna equation of *saṁsāra* and *nirvāna*, which he also expresses as "the nonduality of duality and nonduality." The One and the Many are not on different levels of reality; there is only one reality, but it is experienced in two ways. When we see the world as dual, this is *saṁsāra*.

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[1] *Nonduality*, p. 22.

[2] *Nonduality*, p. 24.

[3] As discussed in Chapter V of this thesis, early Buddhism was pluralistic, and did not share this nondual view of reality. Later Mahāyāna Buddhism proposed the idea of Mind as a nondual totality.

When we see it as nondual, this is *nirvāna*.[4] But the distinction between Mind and phenomena is not to be seen in a dualistic way.

> There is only one reality–this world, right here and now–but this world may be experienced in two different ways. *Saṁsāra* is the relative, phenomenal world as usually experienced, which is delusively understood to consist of a collection of discrete objects (including "me") that interact causally in space and time. *Nirvāna* is that same world but as it is in itself, nondually incorporating both subject and object into a whole.[5]

What is Abhishiktānanda's view of the relation of phenomena to the Absolute, of the Many to the One? To answer this, we must look at his view of *māyā*. He rejects any view of *māyā* as illusion. It is also evident that Abhishiktānanda's view of the One and the Many is based on a Christian trinitarian relation. Monchanin deeply influenced him in this trinitarian approach, so we must also look at Monchanin's trinitarianism, as well as his criticisms of Abhishiktānanda.

A. Two Levels of Reality?

Abhishiktānanda is not always consistent in the position he takes on whether or not the Absolute and phenomena are on two different levels of reality. Part of this is due to his developing understanding of *māyā*. His inconsistency is also due to an alternation between two views of the *advaitic* experience: the Pure Consciousness or *kevala view,* and the *sahaja* view of the *jīvanmukta.*

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[4] *Nonduality*, p. 53.

[5] *Nonduality*, p. 11.

1. Vedānta's monistic idea of Self

a) Only *Brahman* is Real

Abhishiktānanda struggles with the Vedāntic idea that only *Brahman* is ultimately Real:

> God alone is. Who can understand that without falling into monism or pantheism?[6]

Abhishiktānanda's uneasiness here is based on an assumption that we must choose between the Real as unchanging or as changing. If the changing world is the Real, then how can the world be different from God? Is this not the same as pantheism?[7] On the other hand, if the only Reality is unchanging, how can the world even exist? Is this not the same as monism? He wants to reject pantheism, dualism and monism.

When he speculates about only *Brahman* being Real, some of Abhishiktānanda's writings sound very monistic:

> When the Lord finally appears in the depth of the soul–vision of *Brahman [Brahma drishti*]–everything flies away, there is no longer room for anything else at all–The unique and only *Brahman* [*Brahma mātram kevalam*]….[8]

Abhishiktānanda is here referring to an experience of Pure Consciousness. This is the experience of *kevala*, of *Brahman* who is infinitely and essentially alone. When *advaita* is seen as a Pure Consciousness experience, all duality and all sense of otherness or alterity evaporates.[9] The experience burns up every trace of one's individual self:

> Papillon je me suis laissé tromper à ta flamme
> et tu m'y as consumé.
> Consume-moi, brûle en moi tout ce que n'est pas Toi.
> […]
> que du mien, que de moi, rien oncques ne soit plus.
> Qu'en Toi je passe, que Toi je devienne
> "En Toi, Toi", non plus à present,
> pas même cela ne me contenterait plus
> Car dire Toi c'est dire Moi,

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[6] *Diary*, p. 101 (7.4.55).

[7] The issue of pantheism is discussed *infra*.

[8] *Diary*, p. 287 (10.11.66).

[9] "Ehieh Asher Ehieh" *Intériorité*, p. 93.

et de *moi*, les traces mêmes, tu les as consumées.
Ton Moi seul subsiste, ô suprême Soi.
En Toi je dis *Brahmā asmi* [Je suis Brahman]
et je m'absorbe.

Like a moth, I have let myself be deceived by your flame
and in it you have consumed me.
Consume me, burn up in me all that is not You,
O pillar of fire, O pillar of Love.
O Tejo-Linga, O fiery Sperm,
from your Fire, let me be reborn as You.
…of 'mine' and 'me' may nothing any longer remain.
May I pass into You, may I become You
yet now no longer "in You, Yourself,"
for even that would no longer satisfy me.
for to say "You" is to say "I",
and of *myself* you have burnt up every trace.
Your "I" alone remains, O supreme Self,
In You 'I say', I am Brahman [*Brahma aham asmi*]
and I am absorbed..[10]

When he takes this point of view, Abhishiktānanda assumes that there is a Reality that is unchanging and imperishable. He asks how that which is born, which commences and becomes can come from being which is not born.[11] *Brahman* alone is unchanging, and permanent, like the Being spoken of by Parmenides. He cites Parmenides on the opening page of *Guhāja*–the idea that Being is without beginning or end, without birth or death.[12] He links this static idea of Being with prayer and silence (the apophatic tradition). Solitude takes one away from things of the world and of nature, and leaves one infinitely alone. There is no place for work. The Spirit is the resonance in the silence of the Word of the Father, the *bindu* of the mantra *Aum*.[13]

Because *Brahman* is one without a second, we cannot describe *Brahman* language, which is dualistic. That is the basis for Abhishiktānanda's apophaticism.

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[10] *La montée,* pp. 56, 57; *Diary*, pp. 36, 37 (6.4.52).

[11] "Création", *Guhāja*, p. 64.

[12] *Guhāja*, p. 1. The citation is from extracts of fragment 8.

[13] *Ibid.*, pp. 2, 3.

b) Abhishiktānanda's criticism of a monistic view of Self

Despite these monistic passages in his own writings, Abhishiktānanda is critical of Vedānta's overemphasis on unity. He says that the Hindu too often veers, at least in theory, towards an unqualified identification with *Brahman*.[14] But this denial is often only in theory and not in practice. In practice something remains besides this identification:

> No philosophy indeed will ever succeed in explaining or understanding the continued existence of personality at the very heart of the experience of non-duality or in the non-reflex awareness of being and the self. Indian *jñānis* themselves, being prisoners of their own mental categories, will often deny it theoretically in the expressions they use. However, their whole life, and especially the gift of their disinterested love, clearly shows that the personality–or whatever else it is called–has lost nothing essential in attaining to the absolute.[15]

Even if the Vedāntic experience is *experienced* as more than just identification with *Brahman*, it is often *expressed* in a monistic way:

> The real stumbling-block for Christianity does not lie in India's *advaitic* experience, but in the many 'monistic' expressions of that experience–and also in the 'dualistic' formulations which are frequently offered of the Christian faith.[16]

Abhishiktānanda believed that a monistic view of *advaita* was due to an over-application of logic. He believed that Shankara's thought had degenerated–at least in his disciples[17]– by a logicism that had dried up the intuitive insights of the Upanishads:

> That is precisely the greatness of the Upanishads. Dialectic has not yet dried up intuition—as begins to happen in Śvet, is terrible in Maitri (…) Then came the philosophers and dissected the *Brahman-Ātman* (Shankara and Co.)—though he is one-without-a-second, and in his manifestation is just himself.[18]

As this passage shows, Abhishiktānanda not only questions certain philosophical views, but he also questions the later Upanishads (the *Śvetāśvatara* and the *Maitri*) as being overly logical. He can question these Upanishads because he sees all Scripture as only a record of one's experience.

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[14] *Diary*, p. 94 (5.6.54).

[15] *Guru*, p. 84.

[16] *Meeting Point*, p. 96.

[17] *Intériorité*, p. 162.

[18] *Letters*, p. 273 (26.6.72). The word 'logicism' is often used in reference to the attempt by Gottlob Frege and Bertrand Russell to reduce mathematics to logic. I am here using it in a wider sense, of reducing all cosmic diversity to logic. I believe that this expresses Abhishiktānanda's view that an over-application of logic results in monism.

As we shall see, this is an attitude that is common to neo-Vedānta, but contrary to traditional Hindu interpretations of Scripture.

In *Guhāntara*, Abhishiktānanda says that the mistake of India is always to want to give the traditional interpretation of the experience of the rishis the same value as the experience itself. In this way the experience is "to sclerose" the very pregnant and supple notion of *advaita* into a conception that is often very close to monism or to pantheism.[19]

Abhishiktānanda says that Shankara's overuse of logic is evident in Shankara's theory of the double *Brahman.* Shankara distinguishes between *saguṇa Brahman* (with qualities) and *nirguṇa Brahman* (without qualities). Abhishiktānanda says that although there is some basis for this distinction in the Muṇḍaka Upanishad, Shankara goes beyond the actual letter of the Upanishad. He says that this doctrine of the double *Brahman*, at least in its popular form, poses "some very difficult problems." It is linked with the theory of *māyā*. The theory of double *Brahman* relegates the whole universe, beginning with *Īśvara* (*Brahman* as creator), to a sphere of illusion that is barely distinguishable from total unreality. Abhishiktānanda therefore rejects Shankara's distinction between *Brahman* and *Iśvara*, between *nirguṇa* and *saguṇa Brahman.*

> To speak of more than one *Brahman* is to miss seeing the non-dual mystery of the absolute and its manifestations; it is to run the risk of imagining a *dvandva* (the most misleading of all) between the absolute and its manifestations, when in truth there is only being, unique and without a second. Reason is no doubt in a quandary, since at the rational level no solution can be found.[20]

This is one of the clearest expressions of Abhishiktānanda's rejection of the duality of two levels of reality. If we say that only the Absolute is truly Real, then we are making a new dualism

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[19] "L'Epiphanie de Dieu", *Intériorité*, p. 123. Cf. Rudolf Otto: "With Śankara one has first to break through the dry husk of his speculative system and disclose, embedded in his Brahman and Ātman, the living features of ancient Indian mysticism as it survives in the Upanishads and the Purānas." Rudolf Otto: *Mysticism East and West* (Macmillan, 1970 first published 1932), p. 55.

[20] "The Upanishads, An Introduction" *Further Shore*, pp. 101, 102. Has Abhishiktānanda fully appreciated Shankara's reasoning? Shankara's distinction between *saguṇa* and *nirguṇa Brahman* is made in the context of his discussions with opponents; for Shankara, *saguṇa Brahman, or Īśvara* is not fully real; it is the construction of language and ritual. He says that there are in fact three levels of reality: the *Pāramārthika* (transcendental), the *Vyāvahārika* (empirical) and the *Prābhāsika* (illusory). The lower two levels are subrated in favour of the first level, which is *Brahman*, the only real without a second and therefore nondual. However, Abhishiktānanda's point is not that Shankara believed that *Īśvara* is real. Rather, his point is that to distinguish at all between the real and the illusory is to already raise a dualism. Abhishiktānanda's idea of nonduality is that both the One and the Many are real.

between nonduality and duality. He calls this the most misleading dualism of all. This is the point made by Loy in the reference cited at the beginning of this chapter: the nonduality of duality and nonduality. Even if he is not always consistent, Abhishiktānanda rejects such a dualism:

> To say that the unborn [*aja*] alone exists and that the Lord [*Iśvara*] is mythical, non-existent, is to make a dualism [*dvandva*] of *Brahman/Iśvara*, and hence to make *Brahman* evaporate. The *Brahman* without characteristics [*nir-vi śesha*] and the *Brahman* with characteristics [*saviśesha*] are not two. Thought is the indispensable means of living my experience as I; but this is not "other than" (*dvandva*) my experience of the I [*ahamanubhava*].[21]

In Chapter VI of this thesis, I referred to Abhishiktānanda's conclusion as to the relativity but necessity of thought. In the passage just quoted, he links that necessity of thought with the experience of the 'I'. The experience of the Self is thus not to be opposed to thought.[22] The two experiences are "not other" to each other. There is only the one reality. We experience this reality one way when we live it, and we experience it another way when we have the *advaitic* experience. Abhishiktānanda refers to Gnānānanda:

> God is everywhere undivided [*akhanda*]. The heart is the mirror in which we see him. To see him in the universe is to see him with difference [*bheda*] and duality *[dvaita].* To see him in the mirror of the heart is to see him as he is, undivided [*akhanda*], in *advaita*.[23]

This is very similar to Loy's explanation of the meaning of the Mādhyamika doctrine "*saṁsāra* is *nirvāna*." They are two different ways of perceiving, dually and nondually. They are not two realities.[24] Abhishiktānanda himself specifically refers to this Buddhist doctrine:

> *Nirvāna is samsāra* and *samsāra* is *moksha*. Wholly in the one and wholly in the other at one and the same time (*for* in reality there is not the *one* and the *other*), just as God is wholly in his essence and wholly in his freedom.[25]

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[21] *Diary*, p. 324 (30.11.69). And yet at Chaduc's initiation, Chaduc was given the name Ajatānanda, "the bliss of the not-born." *Letters*, p. 339 (OB 2.7.73). This seems to confirm Panikkar's view that Chaduc influenced Abhishiktānanda in an acosmic direction.

[22] The necessity of thought does not mean the necessity of conceptual thought.

[23] *Diary*, p. 146 (6.3.56).

[24] *Nonduality*, p. 53. Loy refers to T.R.V. Murti's statement that *nirvāna* is the true nature of *saṁsāra*. It is not another underlying reality behind appearance.

[25] *Diary*, p. 155 (26.10.56).

Abhishiktānanda believes that our individual self continues to have some individuality, and is not totally swallowed up in *Brahman*. He contrasts his idea of the self with neo-Vedānta's idea of the self:

> The neo-Vedantic interpretation is continually in danger of isolating an abstract idea of *ātman* cut off from its existential basis–the 'Self' as it is commonly translated, i.e., something objectified–and so in effect bringing it into *dvandva* with everything else. Familiarity with the Upanishads and their contemplative reading will certainly help one to recover the freshness and wholeness of the Upanishadic view of things. (To be sure of having rightly understood them, one should always be able to replace the abstract 'self' with "I' or 'myself.')[26]

Abhishiktānanda raises several important points here. He says that the neo-*Vedāntic* idea of the Self is too abstract. It is "cut off from our existence, which is rooted in individuality." We must read the Upanishads by reading 'Self' as 'myself'. It will be recalled that Jung made this criticism of the Hindu idea of the Self–it is just an abstraction. The idea of one without a second is merely a philosophical concept.

But if some individuality remains in the *advaitic* experience, and if we must read the Upanishadic 'Self' as 'myself', what does this do to the idea that enlightenment involves going beyond ego? Passages like this would suggest that ego remains, although it is an ego that has been "expanded" by its consciousness of inter-relation with others.[27] It is an expanded awareness in the *sahaja* state.

Another important point that Abhishiktānanda makes in this passage is that the Self cannot be objectified. This is the same point that Loy makes with respect to "reification" of Mind-Only.[28] If the Self is objectified, then we are viewing the nondual "origin" in dualistic terms. No objectification of God can be God.[29]

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[26] "The Upanishads: An Introduction", *Further Shore*, p. 103. On p. 102, Abhishiktānanda says that the term *ātman* "is only an attempt to indicate that which makes an individual to be himself, that is, the principle of his essential personal identity." *Atman* is not mind. It is the absolutely bare essence, the spark of the soul; on the other is everything else: eating, tasting, breathing, touching, seeing, hearing, imagining, conceiving, thinking, willing. Approach to the Upanishads", *The Further Shore*, p. 86.

[27] "My I [je] penetrates the I of every conscious being. And in this penetrating of his I, it is my own I that is penetrated by his. It is the paradoxical encounter of two INFINITES. The whole mystery of the relationship of I to I." *Diary*, p. 375 (16.4.73).

[28] *Nonduality*, pp. 25, 215.

[29] *Guhāja*, p. 40

In this passage, Abhishiktānanda also emphasizes that in order to recover the true meaning of the *advaitic* experience, we must return to the Upanishads. Just as Heidegger refers to the pre-Socratics in order to overcome the conceptualization of Plato and Aristotle, so Abhishiktānanda refers to the Upanishads, which were written before Shankara's ideas:

> Shankara is not much help; it is as if one were to look for the Council of Trent in the words of the Gospel![30]

Abhishiktānanda says that we should not speak of an 'identity' between *Brahman* and ourselves. It is only the logicians who speak of identity. Theologians speak of pantheism. The seers of the Upanishads just say *advaita*.[31] These *rishis* did not need to make the distinction between *saguna* and *nirguṇa Brahman*.

> In their piercing intuition they took in the *vyaṣṭiḥ* [individuality] and the *samaṣṭiḥ* [totality] […] they beheld the absolute in the manifested and the manifested in the absolute, for they saw through to the depth of things and of being.[32]

The seers saw the absolute in the manifested. This is the practice of seeing *Brahman* in all things, which as we have seen was emphasized by both Ramaṇa and Abhishiktānanda. To see *Brahman* in everything is not just an idea or a matter of speculation. It involves one's whole being, and requires the attitude of awakening [the *evaṃvid*] towards the whole cosmos.[33]

Abhishiktānanda therefore contrasts the Upanishads with Shankara and the later Vedāntic thinkers. Is he correct that Shankara's view is of a complete identification with *Brahman* and that it is therefore monistic? Caroline Franks Davis says that Shankara need not be interpreted in a strictly monistic sense. Instead of reading him as saying that a person is 'identical' with *Brahman*, we may read him as saying something more like "I am 'essenced' by *Brahman*" or "*Brahman* exists me".[34]

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[30] *Letters*, p. 273 (MC 25.6.72).

[31] "Ehieh Asher Ehieh", *Intériorité*, p. 93. Hacker says that Vedānta overintrepreted a unity of essence as an identity of being. Paul Hacker: "Being and Spirit in Vedānta", *Philology and Confrontation*, ed. Wilhelm Halbfass (State University of New York, 1995), p. 199.

[32] "The Upanishads: An Introduction", *Further Shore*, p. 101.

[33] "The Upanishads: An Introduction", *Further Shore*, p. 94.

[34] Caroline Franks Davis: *The Evidential Force of Religious Experience* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1989), p. 181. She refers in support to Eric Lott and to Rudolf Otto. In at least one place, Abhishiktānanda expresses a similar view: "We must remember that Shankara's views are just one of the darshanas, and we must not interpret him with

Hacker, too doubts whether Shankara's teachings are to be interpreted in a monistic sense. "The doctrine of the identity of God and the soul consists actually only in the denial of their separateness."[35] Things exist *for* the self; this excludes monism.[36] Hacker says that for Shankara, the self is the self-luminous; it is the light that is presupposed in every act of cognition. This doctrine of light allows a more vigorous portrayal of the spiritual nature of self. To say that the self is light means that it is better known than things which come to be given only in the process of knowledge; this theory does not necessitate monism.[37]

Hacker says that in Shankara's discussion of the self, the doctrine that there is only one self emerges only in passing. He says that there is in Shankara a considerable body of doctrine of the self without any mention of monism. In Hacker's view, Shankara wants to lead us to experience, not to argumentation; he does not argue rationally for monism; he just points to Upanishads.[38] Further, Hacker points out that Shankara himself has an appreciation for manifested reality. Many passages written by Shankara are theistic where the logic would call for impersonalistic and monistic terms. For example, *Hari* is not compared with Lower *Brahman* but with the transcendent Highest Self.[39]

Whether or not Shankara's teachings are monistic, we need to examine Abhishiktānanda's claim that the Upanishads give a non-monistic view of *Brahman*. Abhishiktānanda says that *Brahman* is used in two senses in the Upanishads. *Brahman* is used equivocally to refer to the Absolute beyond all relation and also to the creative source of all that is. Shankara tried to find a way through the meanings of the term.[40] Abhishiktānanda believes that the two meanings cannot be resolved logically, but must be left in paradox. He says that Badarayana, the compiler of the *Brahmasūtra*, oscillates between these two views of *Brahman*.

Western logic." Abhishiktānanda here refers to Otto's *Mysticism East and West* (New York: Macmillan, 1970; first published 1932). *Diary*, p. 29, ft. 8 (31.3.52).

[35] Paul Hacker: "Distinctive Features of the Doctrine and Terminology", *Philology and Confrontation, p. 89.*

[36] Paul Hacker "Śaṇkara the Yogin and Śaṇkara the Advaitin", *Philology and Confrontation, p. 123.*

[37] *Ibid.,* p. 125. See also "Being and Spirit in Vedānta", *Philology and Confrontration*, pp. 195, 196.

[38] Paul Hacker: "Śaṇkara the Yogin and Śaṇkara the Advaitin", *Philology and Confrontation*, pp. 102-104.

[39] Paul Hacker: "Relations of Early Advaitins to Vaiṣṇavism", *Philology and Confrontation*, p. 135. This was also noticed by Rudolf Otto in his *Mysticism East and West* (New York: Macmillan, 1970; first published 1932).

[40] "Approach to the Upanishads", *Further Shore*, p. 100.

It is only the later logicians who choose one of the two extremes. Shankara denies all duality. Rāmānuja and Madhva do not want to give up their love for their Saviour. The best integration of these two aspects of *Brahman* is found in the *Bhagavad Gītā*, which speaks of the mystery of *advaita* (nonduality) and *an-eka* (not-one) at the same time.[41] There is both immanence and transcendence:

> Behind the multiplicity of particular forces, the one who knows (e*vaṃvid*) discovers a mysterious force which is at the same time immanent and transcendent. Certain schools, notably those of the Kauṣītaki, recognize *Brahman* in this force: *Prāna* is *Brahman*, the fullness of the mystery, Kauṣītaki used to say.[42]

Pratima Bowes also says that there are two views of *Brahman* within the Upanishads. One view is that of a static, unchanging reality, and the other view is that of a *Brahman* that emanates itself. She points out that the word *Brahman* itself comes from the root *brh*, meaning "to grow", and that Danielou translates it as the 'divine immensity'. This suggests that the ultimate reality does not have to be conceived as something static, finished or fixed.[43] The limitlessness of *Brahman* can include both being and becoming, even if this is paradoxical to reason.[44] There are two forms of *Brahman*: the manifest existent (*sat*) and the unmanifest that (*tat*) (BU 2,3,1). This is not to be seen as two *Brahmans*, but rather the same *Brahman*. The same energy expresses itself at different levels of being: physical, vital, mental, conscious, and bliss (spiritual). The different characteristics of *Brahman* are realized in two different types of mystical experience. The first is where all particulars have been absorbed, including a separate sense of the experiencing subject. It is an experience of infinite and limitless being. This is the imperishable, the unseen seer, and the unheard hearer, unthought thinker, the unknown knower

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[41] *Guhāja*, p. 78.

[42] "Approach to the Upanishads", *Further Shore*, p. 92. The reference appears to be to the Kauṣītaki Upanishad III, 1.

[43] Pratima Bowes: "Mysticism in the Upanisads and in Sankara's Vedanta", *The Yogi and the Mystic*, ed. Karel Werner (London: Curzon Press, 1989), p. 64.

[44] Bowes says that Shankara does not retain idea of non-duality of essence; only the non-duality of things. His *Brahmasutrabhasya* relies on logic: the one and many are opposites.

(BU 3,8,11). In this experience, the experiencing subject is like a lump of salt thrown in water.[45] The second experience is of diversity:

> But the same Upanisads give also another account of the *brahman* experience which is not non-dual in the sense that there is no second thing present in experience, but in the sense that all things in their particularity are actually seen as permeated by the same essence which is *ātman* or *brahman*. They are non-dual with it as the waves of the sea are non-dual with the sea, although seen also as separate items.[46]

The two types of experience that Bowes refers to are what we have called Pure Consciousness and *sahaja* awareness. In the *sahaja* awareness, there is an experience of diversity issuing forth from a primal unity, as a kind of emanation.. The Upanishads speak in terms of such emanation. For example, it is said that the emanation of the world is like the thread being emitted by a spider (MuU 1,1,7). There is also an emphasis in the Upanishads on the world deriving from a portion of Purusha. (CU 3,13,7) Bowes therefore says that the diversity of the world does not disappear when unity with the One is realized.[47]

Ramaṇa refers to the world as having emanated from *Brahman* in his translation of the *Vivekacudamani*.

> "Thou are That" because this whole world emanates from Brahman, which alone IS, and is Brahman Itself, just as pots come from clay and are clay itself and indeed are made of clay."[48]

Hacker also comments that the Upanishads speak of the world when not yet unfolded. This is designated as "the unmanifest" (*avyakta*).[49]

This view that *Brahman* emits or emanates the world is not emphasized in Vedānta. Vedānta tends to regard the world as a result of ignorance and illusion. Although Vedānta does acknowledge some reality to the world in its doctrine of *anirvacanīya*, the emphasis on the full reality of the world as an expression of *śakti* is more a *tantric* doctrine. Loy says that both Hindu

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[45] Bowes, *op. cit.* p. 59. She cites BU 2,3,1.

[46] *Ibid.* p. 61.

[47] *Ibid.* p. 62.

[48] *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, p. 149.

[49] Paul Hacker: "Distinctive Features of the Doctrine and Terminology", *Philology and Confrontation*, p. 83: Brh. Up I, 4,7.

and Buddhist *tantra* hold that the ultimate nondual reality possesses two aspects in its fundamental nature–negative and positive, static and dynamic, *Śiva* and *Śakti*, *Prajñā* and *Upāya*, *Śūnyatā* and *karuṇā*. The ultimate goal of *tantra* is union between these two aspects of the reality. In this union, one realizes the non-dual nature of the self and the not-self.[50]

This *tantric* positive valuation of the world is expressed in the *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha* and in Kashmir *Śaivism*. Swami Muktananda points out that within Kashmir *Śaivism*, the world is seen as a real manifestation of Shiva's *śakti*. Everything is in consciousness, including the material world. Chapple cites Abhinavagupta in this connection:

> Shiva, the independent and pure Self that always vibrates in the mind, is the Parashakti that rises as joy in various sense experiences. Then the experience of this outer world appears as its Self. I do not know where this word '*saṃsāra*' has come from.[51]

Lilian Silburn writes about the Shaivite doctrine of the emanation of the world from Shiva. In the dance of Shiva, the sound vibrations from his drum give rise to the universe as they generate time and space. With his other hand, he holds the fire of resorption. This fire consumes the I. There is therefore both emanation and resorption. The creative emission takes place when the Goddess energy (*śakti*), is churned by Bhairava. This is the "gross aspect of vibration" in which Shiva differentiates himself from his energy in order to contemplate her. After this separation there is a return into unity. The *yogi* dwells at this junction of the twofold movement of emanation and resorption. The *yogi* is returned to the primordial oneness, the vibration of the universal heart. In this union, Shiva takes back the divided energy, turning it inward by a series of withdrawal to the initial vibration of the peaceful center.[52]

As we have also seen, Gnānānanda emphasized his lineage within Kashmir *Śaivism*. Abhishiktānanda was probably influenced by him with respect to some of these ideas. We also know that Abhishiktānanda was aware of some of the work of Lilian Silburn[53], and of some

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[50] *Nonduality*, p. 270.

[51] Swami Muktananda: Preface to *The Concise Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha* (State University of New York, 1984), p. v.

[52] Lilian Silburn: *Kundalini: energy of the depths: A Comprehensive Study Based on the Scriptures of Nondualistic Kashmir Shaivism* (State University of New York, 1988), pp. 5-9.

[53] As already mentioned, Monchanin referred Abhishiktānanda to some of her articles. Abhishiktānanda also refers to Silburn's *instant et Cause: Le discontinu dans la pensée philosophique de l'Inde* (Paris, 1955) in *Further Shore*, p. 86, ft. 89.

ideas of Kashmir *Śaivism*. As we shall see, Abhishiktānanda speaks of the emanation of the world in terms of the *śakti* of Shiva.

Loy refers to the idea of emanation as "a weaker kind of monism". On this view, instead of there being only a monistic One, there is only one *type* of thing (such as Mind) of which the many particulars are manifestations.[54] It is unclear why he still refers to it as monism, since both the One and its manifestations are real. Why not just refer to it as nondualism? It appears that Loy's reluctance to refer to emanation as nondualism is that he regards it as a reification of emptiness.

c) Abhishiktānanda's "purification" of the idea of the Self

Abhishiktānanda wanted to "purify" the Vedāntic idea of the Self. He wanted to do this by affirming that creation is also real. There must be *both* nonduality and difference. In a chapter from *Guhāntara*, he notes his opposition to both Rāmānuja's and Shankara's conceptions of the Self. He says that a Christian cannot accept Rāmānuja's solution of a unity between the essence of the human self and the Self of the Supreme Saviour. Nor can the Christian accept the "sublimation without any remainder" of the human self in the Absolute Self of *Brahman* at the time of one's realization.[55] He says that Rāmānuja wanted at all costs to safeguard "a kind of face to face" in the definitive experience. Rāmānuja retained an emphasis on *bhakti,* and on the vision of and the reciprocal enjoyment of God and of his elect.[56] In other words, Abhishiktānanda sees some dualism remaining in Rāmānuja. But neither does Abhishiktānanda accept Shankara's solution–"sublimation" of the individual into *Brahman.* Instead of these theories, Abhishiktānanda says that created individuals are not other than God and also not not-other than God.[57] Each of God's manifestations are both *one* and *unique*.[58]

It is clear that Abhishiktānanda's non-monism is based on his Christian beliefs. He says that a Christian cannot deny all 'alterity' or otherness between the creature and God. But he goes

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[54] *Nonduality*, pp. 25, 28.

[55] "Cheminements Intérieurs", *Intériorité*, p. 41, ft. 4.

[56] "The Experience of God in the Religions of the Far East", (1973), *Eyes of Light*, p. 26.

[57] *Diary*, p. 215 (17.5.58).

[58] *Letters*, p. 310 (MR, 2.9.73).

on to say that this ‘otherness’ is different than our use of the word ‘other’ in created reality. God and creation co-exist, although the basis for this co-existence is a “mystery”. And despite this co-existence, one can also not refuse to say that there is no second to God, *ekam eva advityam.*[59] Only *Brahman* is Real, and yet creation exists.

Abhishiktānanda frequently uses the idea of “mystery” to justify holding to both the view that only *Brahman* is Real, and the view that the world is real. “Mystery” is an experience beyond what can be spoken, imagined or conceived. The mystery is that there is both nonduality and difference:

> The individual is the mystery of God realized in a not-one [*aneka*] way in its […] indivisibility as undivided non-duality [*akhanda-advaita*].[60]

The two aspects of the divine mystery–nonduality and difference (*advaita* and *aneka*) are inseparable. Both ideas must be maintained in full force, and we must not seek to diminish one in order to exalt the other.[61]

The mystery is of the ineffable reality that lies hidden behind all things and yet penetrates all things. Abhishiktānanda says that there are three abysses [*abîmes*] of this mystery that the creature successively discovers in God:

1. The Mystery of Unity or *advaita*, non-distinction. This mystery is attained by “drastic negation” [apophaticism];
2. The Mystery of Trinity or of *an-eka* (not-one); and
3. The mystery of charity or of the *kenosis*.[62]

The Mystery of *kenosis* is that of the eternal emergence of being from the primordial non-manifested. God has chosen to have need of humans, to not be without them. Creation is the *kenosis*, the self-emptying in love, the issuing from the One. The fundamental *kenosis* is the creation, the coming out of the One (according to Plotinus), or out of Being (according to Vedānta).[63] Humans and all of creation are the state of *kenosis* of Being.[64]

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[59] “Cheminements Intérieurs”, *Intériorité*, p. 45, ft. 13.

[60] *Diary*, p. 214 (17.5.58). See Chapter X of this thesis for a detailed discussion of *aneka*.

[61] *Guhāja*, p. 81.

[62] “Cheminements intérieurs”, *Intériorité*, p. 68.

[63] “Cheminements intérieurs”, *Intériorité*, p. 75

In *Guhāntara* Abhishiktānanda says that this *kenosis* entails a real death of God. There is a movement from the God as One without a Second to God as Creator and God as Love. God no longer has the attributes of *kevala*, *ekatva* or *advaita*. Abhishiktānanda asks whether we can still say that God exists after this *kenosis*. The *kenosis* is a giving of God's self. This is why no one has ever seen the Father, but only the Son. The *kenosis* is the emanation from the One, if we use the terms of Plotinus, or the emanation from Being, if we use the Vedāntic terminology. Creation is thus a real mystery.[65]

But at the very Source of Being there is communion in the Trinity. It is a *koinonia, co-esse,* 'being with', 'being together', a community of being, mutual love and communication of life, an eternal call to each other, an eternal rest in each other. In its most impenetrable core of non-duality, Being is the threefold movement within Itself towards Itself.[66]

This same mystery of love occurs between individual persons. There is a mystery of the relation between persons, between consciousnesses, from 'I' to 'I'.[67] The whole of creation is communion, word and face, mystery. Charity is a reciprocal love. We are collaborators in God's love, collaborators of his own being. He quotes Tagore: "Where would your love be if I did not exist?"[68]

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[64] "Esseulement" *Intériorité*, p. 134.

[65] "Dans le Centre le Plus Profond", *Guhāntara* (unpublished). In *Guhāntara*, Abhishiktānanda says that the doctrine of *māyā* is perhaps the best human solution to this mystery. In later writings he does not seem to hold to this positive evaluation of the doctrine of *mayā.*

[66] *Saccidānanda*, p. 109.

[67] *Diary*, p. 376 (17.4.73).

[68] "Cheminements Intérieurs", *Intériorité*, p. 78.

2. Abhishiktānanda's interpretation of m*āyā*

Abhishiktānanda emphasizes more our unity with God than our difference from God. Abhishiktānanda in fact has more difficulty in accepting the reality of the world than he does in accepting our Oneness of *Brahman*.

> But what really needs faith–and a faith that is particularly difficult for those who have been touched by the consuming fire of Being–is to believe in one's own existence in the presence of the Lord God…[69]

Abhishiktānanda rejects the idea of *māyā* as illusion. In some early statements, this rejection is not so much because he appreciates the reality of diverse things, as because only the One is real. He refers to Parmenides' idea of unity here:

> To speak of illusion in the vulgar sense of the word, like speaking of non-being is to pose an alternative to being. In truth there is nothing but being, in all its fullness, in multiple forms in which it appears to humans. Up to the most minimal details and the most external of this manifestation, it is only being which appears and which shines. There is not being and non-being, there is not more being here and less there. There is nothing but being in its adamantine unity, as Parmenides already contemplated at the dawn of Greek thought before Plato oriented the Mediterranean spirit to the side of *eidos* (concept).[70]

Phenomena are not illusions. They are appearances of the Real. And as such they are "not other than" the Real:

> But the word 'illusion', *māyā*, is misleading (…) 'Appearance' would be better, provided you realize that it is the Real (…) which thus makes its appearance. An appearance which is *not* other than the Real… [71]

This is a nondual view of reality. But it is a view that gives priority to unity over diversity.

In *Guhāja*, written in 1954 (sometimes referred to as *Guhāntara II*), he writes that he wants to "rectify" the Vedāntin view of *māyā.*

> For what is *māyā?* All distinction, particularity, individuality. But there would never be distinction nor particularity, nor individuality, if the divine absolute, Being, was not there, penetrating all. [72]

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[69] *Saccidānanda*, p. 115.

[70] "Présence de Dieu-Présence à Dieu", *Intériorité*, p. 144. My translation.

[71] *Letters*, p. 294 (MC, 12.4.73).

[72] "Creation" *Guhāja*, p. 66.

There is a problem of how individuals are not other than God and yet are not not-other. Abhishiktānanda says that the *advaita* solution of *māyā* is a "desperate solution" to this problem.[73] For Abhishiktānanda, the rectification of the idea of *māyā* will be through Christianity.

> …Christianity saves [the whole psychological and sensory world, the *śarīram* of Indian tradition] from the Vedāntin *māyā*, as in past days it saved it from Greek pneumatism and Gnostic angelism. For it is in the wholeness of his being that man's final perfection must be achieved.[74]

He says that the whole world is creation, a manifestation of God. The world comes from God and it returns to God. The world is on its way towards God, like Christ, passing to the Father. There is not really *māyā* in the strict sense of the word, except for the person who has separated the universe from the supreme reality and who conceives God in function of this distinction.[75] In other words, *māyā* is a concept that makes sense only from a dualistic perspective of God and world. Creation is *māyā* only when it is considered to be distinct from the divine 'essence'. But it is not distinct in that way. Rather, there is a divine superessence in each being of creation.[76]

It is interesting that in defence of his view that distinctions are real, Abhishiktānanda refers to Ramaṇa's work *Ulladu Narpadu.* He also says that it is because distinctions are real that the *jīvanmukta* does not have to stay in *samādhi*. This relates a realist appreciation of the world to the *sahaja* experience. In immersing ourselves in God, we do not disappear. The sage can discover, adore and serve God in creation and in the multiplicity of beings.[77]

Abhishiktānanda also interprets *māyā* in terms of the creative power (*śakti*) of God.

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[73] *Diary*, p. 215 (17.5.58).

[74] *L'Inde et l'Église*, cited in *Letters*, p. 136.

[75] *Guhāja*, pp. 70, 85. Because of this dependence on God, *māyā* is neither being nor non-being. *Guhāja*, p. 67. Vedānta terms this state *anirvacanīya*. *See* Hacker: "The Theory of Degrees of Reality in Advaita Vedānta", P*hilology and Confrontation*, p. 141.

[76] *Guhāja*, p. 63.

[77] *Guhāja*, pp. 86, 87.

> On the pretext of *advaita*, it is not permitted to despise *śakti*, that brahmic power which is present and active in the whole world of *māyā*.[78]

This appreciation of the positive power of *śakti* is probably due to the non-orthodox views to which Abhishiktānanda had been exposed, such as *tantra* and Kashmir *Śaivism.* Zimmer says this of the positive power of *māyā:*

> Both the Tantra and popular Hinduism accept the truth of Advaita Vedānta but shift the accent to the positive aspect of māyā. The world is the unending manifestation of the dynamic aspect of the divine, and as such should not be devaluated and discarded as suffering and imperfection, but celebrated, penetrated by enlightening insight, and experienced with understanding.[79]

Panikkar says that Abhishiktānanda's conception of *advaita* is closer to Kashmir *Śaivism* than that of Shankara.[80] In fact, Abhishiktānanda does make reference to Kashmir *Śaivism* in relation to his emphasis on the reality of the world and the creative power of *śakti*. In *Guhāja*, Abhishiktānanda refers specifically to the Kashmir *Śaivism's* doctrine whereby Shiva transforms himself by his *śakti* into the world. Abhishiktānanda says that this is a real transformation. He refers to it as a *kenosis* from unity to diversity.

Ermites du Saccidananda has a lengthy and technical appendix on the subject of *māyā*. This appendix (Note D) was most likely written by Monchanin. However, since the book was jointly authored by both Monchanin and Abhishiktānanda, it is certain that Abhishiktānanda was also aware of this section. Monchanin refers to *māyā* and *śakti*. He says that *māyā* is a dynamic category; it refers to the movement of manifestation in evolution, and the movement of involution back in the grand cosmic breath.[81] He compares the concept of *māyā* to the concept of becoming in Greek philosophy; it is something between Being and not-being. But he says that Shankara is too "Eleatic" to accept this kind of solution. For Shankara, the One *is*, with no multiplicity. *Māyā* then refers to the illusion of the world of multiplicity. Monchanin

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[78] *Diary*, p. 176 (24.11.56). See also "Dans Le Centre Le Plus Profond", *Guhāntara* (unpublished), where he says that *śakti* is *māyā*.

[79] Heinrich Zimmer: *Philosophies of India* (Princeton, 1951). Monchanin was aware of this book, and even wrote Abhishiktānanda about it. Monchanin comments that the book is all still "*māyāyic"*. *Abbé Monchanin: Lettres au Père Le Saux*, ed. Françoise Jacquin (Paris: Cerf, 1995), p. 117.

[80] Panikkar, Introduction to *Diary*, p. xiv.

[81] "Note D: Māyā" Ermites *du Saccidananda*, pp 88-92. Monchanin cites Olivier Lacombe's *L'Absolu selon le Vedānta*.

distinguishes the *vivartavāda* view of *māyā* from the *parināmavāda* view. The former view sees the transformation of the world as illusory, and uses *māyā* in the sense of 'illusion'. He places Shankara in this category, at least as Shankara has been commonly interpreted.[82] He says that this *vivartavāda* view maintains the simplicity and the transcendence of God, but that it leads to the denial of the world and of the self, and leads to acosmism and solipsism. The other view of *māyā*, *parināmavāda*, holds that there is a real transformation of *Brahman* into the world. Shiva is absolute in his aspect of transcendence, but it is the same Absolute in its aspect of immanence that appears in the world. The world is real in itself, at least in a modal form. Thus, although Shiva is *kevala*, absolutely alone, Shiva retains the possibility of manifesting himself by his *śakti* into possible worlds. Monchanin links this view with Kashmir *Śaivism* and with *tantra*.

But it is not only Kashmir *Śaivism* that emphasizes *śakti.* Ramaṇa, who is viewed by many as the preeminent modern *advaitin*, makes frequent references to *śakti.* Therefore, even if it can be shown that these ideas of Abhishiktānanda are not traditional interpretations of Vedānta, that does not mean they are merely marginal views. On the contrary, Ramaṇa and his writings continue to be referred to, both within and outside of Indian thought. Panikkar also does not consider the fact that Abhishiktānanda was exposed to many of these ideas through Gnānānanda, who specifically claimed a link with Kashmir Śaivism. Gnānānanda made the statement that *Iśvara*, the *guru* and the *ātman* are the same Reality in different forms.[83] Gnānānanda also refers to *śakti*.

Abhishiktānanda says that the fact that this *śakti* is present and active in the whole world is the mystery of creation. *Māyā* expresses this wonder at the mystery of creation:

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[82]*Ibid*. But Monchanin says that other interpreters of Shankara do not take the view of a unique *jivātman*, but rather hold to a plurality (*aneka-jiva-vāda*). The term *jivātman* means "individual self." He refers to a work on Śivādvaita by S.S. Suryanaravana Sastri. This may explain the use by Abhishiktānanda of the term *aneka* in the sense of 'not-one.' Swami Nityananda, the current swami at Tapovanam, refers to S.S. Suryanaravana Sastri's work. Nityananda says, "When the scriptures teach non-duality (*advaita*), they do not mean to deny the existence of the two, but the duality of the two. They say 'they are not two'–and not 'there are not two.' He says that Śaiva Siddhānta teaches an idenitty of essence in spite of difference in existence. "Śaiva Siddhānta", *Mysticism in Shaivism and Christianity*, ed. Bettina Bäumer (Abhishiktānanda Society, 1997), p. 52.

[83] *Sadguru Gnānānanda,* p. xxi. But Gnānānanda does sometimes express himself in a monistic fashion: *Sadguru*, p. xxiii: "From the standpoint of the *jivan-mukta*, if standpoint it may be called, there is no duality consequently no individuality."

> Is *māyā* anything else than the recognition, expressed in different terms, of the indefinable mystery of created being, together with the nostalgia–unknown in the West–for the essential non-duality?[84]

Abhishiktānanda compares this *śakti* to the words *ruah and sophia* in Judaism. He points out that the Jewish colony of Elephantine associated a feminine consort (*parèdre*) with Yahweh.[85] He also compares *śakti* to the Holy Spirit in Christianity. He says that everything in the Incarnation is attributed to the *śakti* of God. Jesus is conceived by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is present at his Baptism in the Jordan; it descends upon him, says the Gospel according to Mark. It is the Spirit who leads him out into the desert.[86]

Is Abhishiktānanda reinterpreting *māyā* in Christian terms? Or are there Hindu sources that would also reject a view of *māyā* as illusion? Hacker says that the idea of illusionism is not inherent in Hinduism. It derived from later Buddhist relativism or Madhyamika, and from the epistemological idealism of Yogācāra.[87] Hacker also says that Shankara's use of *māyā* has its source in Mahāyāna.[88] In any event, m*āyā* never means the same as an illusion on the sensory level; the world is not fictitious. There is a distinction between the practically existent (first degree illusion) and the fictitiously existent (second degree illusion).[89]

Avidyā [or ignorance] is closely related to the doctrine of *māyā.* In Puranic thought, *avidyā* is only another name for *Prakṛti* and does not connote an illusion.[90] Hacker says that even for Shankara, theorizing about *avidyā* is unimportant. What is important is the awakening. If one asks, "To whom does the unawakened state belong?", the answer is "To you who are

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[84] *Diary*, p. 94 (2.7.54).

[85] "Theologoumenon Upasana: méditation sur la Trinité", *Intériorité*, (1970) p. 222.

[86] Odette Baumer-Despeigne: The Spiritual Way of Henri Le Saux Swami Abhishiktānanda , Bulletin of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue, 1993, vol. 48, Oct., p. 22. (Dec., 1968).

[87] Paul Hacker: "The Theories of Degrees of Reality in Advaita Vedānta", *Philology and Confrontation*, p. 137. Hacker calls radical monism *Kevalādvaita*. This view of the *kevala* is based on the doctrine of illusionism.

[88] Paul Hacker: "Distinctive Features of the Doctrine and Terminology", *Philology and Confrontation*, p. 81.

[89] Paul Hacker: "The Theories of Degrees of Reality in Advaita Vedānta", *Philology and Confrontation*, p. 144. Hacker points out that this gave the world a higher degree of reality than the earlier Buddhist sources ascribed to it. See "Being and Spirit in Vedānta", *Philology and Confrontation*, p. 201. Hacker says that Advaita Vedanta similarly distances itself from epistemological idealism or from the Buddhist Consciousness-only doctrine. "The illusionism and monism of Advaita Vedanta did not impede this turning toward objectivism." "The Idea of the Person in the Thinking of Vedānta Philosophers", *Philology and Confrontation*, p. 158

[90] Paul Hacker: "Distinctive Features of the Doctrine and Terminology", *Philology and Confrontation*, p. 76.

asking!" But if there is an absolute identity of God and the soul, is not God the bearer of *avidyā*? Shankara's answer is that if you are awakened, there is no longer an unawakened state which belongs to anybody.

> The answers are not philosophically exact; rather they are pedagogically compelling. They intentionally ignore what the questions are hinting at. While avoiding everything abstract and general, they attempt to make it immediately comprehensible to the questioner that the important thing is "being awakened," that is, liberation, not the discovery of satisfactory solutions for the problems which emerge upon thinking through the concept of *avidyā*. For there is no more *avidyā* for one who is awakened…[91]

This refusal to speculate on the theoretical implications of Vedānta is also found in Ramaṇa's responses to his questioners. He continually turns the questioner back on himself or herself.

Hacker also says that the view of *māyā* as illusion was the result of logicistic thinking. In Shankara's disciples, *māyā* is often of more concern than liberation. Advaitins after Sankara ceased to think of *ātman* in terms of neither being nor non-being; the self became the indubitable. Mysticism then became confined within the bounds of logic.[92] The idea of the reality of the world was then continued in *Bhedabheda* Vedānta. Unlike *Advaita* Vedānta, which by a strict use of logic keeps the world and the Absolute apart, *Bhedabheda* Vedānta brings the world and the Absolute together in its formula "both and".[93] In Bhedabheda Advaita, there is simultaneous identity and difference.

Even if *māyā* is not to be interpreted as illusion, we may adopt Heidegger's views that there is a "hiddenness" in the very manifestation of Being. While revealing itself to us, Being conceals itself and holds itself back at the same time. 'Phenomenon' for Heidegger thus has a double sense of 'appearance'. One sense is positive (showing itself) and the other sense is negative (seeming to be). Truth is a dis-covering of this showing; falsity is covering it up. In 1966, Abhishiktānanda writes about Heidegger's views of hiddenness:

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[91] *Ibid*. p. 66. Hacker refers to Shankara's *Brahmasūtrabhāsya*.

[92] Paul Hacker: "Theories of Degrees of Reality in Advaita Vedānta", *Philology and Confrontation*, p. 141, 142.

[93] *Ibid*. p. 143. Both schools grant an incomplete reality to the world. One may ask whether Abhishiktānanda's ideas are closer to *Bhedabheda* Vedānta than to *Advaita* Vedānta.

I have just read *L'essence de la Vérité* by Heidegger. It is illuminating on this point. Being discloses itself in every be-ing, but this disclosure itself obscures it, because while every be-ing manifests being and attracts the attention of consciousness precisely insofar as it is Being, consciousness is constantly in danger of reducing Being to that particular be-ing which is before it. (Christian theology can be read beneath the surface in these pages.) Not that there would be be-ings which could be added together, any more than the '*so called*' Divine persons can be added together, being distinct but nonetheless *a-dvitīya*.[94]

3. Transcendence in Immanence

a) The "beyond" of Transcendence

Abhishiktānanda retains an idea of Transcendence. "God is the beyond. God is also the Infinitely Near."[95] But this Transcendence is also totally immanent within us:

> God is as transcendent to you when you gaze at him within as when you gaze at him without. And just as inaccessible.[96]

In referring to the 'Beyond', is Abhishiktānanda setting up another dualism–between phenomena and the Beyond? Again, Abhishiktānanda alternates between two views of the Beyond, depending on whether he is referring to the Pure Consciousness experience or to the *sahaja* awareness of the *jīvanmukta.*

When Abhishiktānanda is referring to the *advaitic* experience in terms of Pure Consciousness, or *kevala*, he tends to refer to the Transcendent as a different level of reality. In at least one of these passages, he rejects even the term 'immanence' in favour of a total Transcendence:

> It is not a question here of a God who would be immanent, period. For again one must ask, immanent to whom? At bottom, moreover, true immanence and true transcendence are on a par with each other. Perfect transcendence lets nothing else subsist. Having arrived, in effect, at the center of his inmost self, man is so seized by the mystery that thenceforth it is beyond his power to pronounce either

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[94] *Diary*, p. 284 (19.10.66).

[95] *Guru*, p. 43.

[96] *Diary*, p. 150 (14.6.56).

> a Thou or an I. The mystery has so engulfed him in the depths of his selfhood that it is as though he has vanished from his own sight.[97]

Elsewhere, Abhishiktānanda refers to the Beyond in relation to the *sahaja* experience of seeing God within everything. He says that all phenomena are "signs", so nothing is the Absolute, but the Absolute is in everything.[98] If we regard the Beyond as an object, then we interpret it wrongly, at the level of the mind. In these passages, there is an emphasis on the Transcendent being both within phenomena and beyond them. An example of this view is the following:

> God's transcendence is the very source of his immanence, 'transcendence' and 'immanence' being in the end only two human words which endeavour to indicate that the supreme is at once beyond and within, that Being is at the same time *rūpa* and *arūpa*, Form and Formless.[99]

Transcendence and immanence are reciprocal terms. They are only two aspects–at the human level–of the unique and indivisible divine Being.[100]

In 1966, Abhishiktānanda says that God is both what is seen and the mystery of that which is not seen. [101] He says that this *sahaja* awareness of seeing God in all things is attained only after the *kevala* experience. No one can know God's immanence unless he or she has first realized his transcendence.[102]

> And the yogi is as much with God in the song of the *līlā* as in the songs of the *kevala* [total solitude]. But who would ever sing the varied songs of the *līlā*, if he has not first sung in the solitude of his heart and soul the unique song of the *kevala*? For it is form his *kevala* that the *līlā* wells up.[103]

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[97] "The Experience of God in the Religions of the Far East" (1973), *Eyes of Light*, pp. 23-24. Monchanin writes to Duperray May/40: "Le problème de Dieu, comme transcendance pure, c'est le point où Eckhart et Sankara communient." Cited by Jacques Gadille, "Jules Monchanin Prophète dans la Culture et dans l'Église de son Temps", in *Jules Monchanin: Regards croisés d'Occident et d'Orient (Lyon: Profac-Credic, 1997), p. 38, ft. 16.* This is probably why Monchanin says that notions of transcendence and immanence are not known in India. *Lettres au Père Le Saux*, p. 22, Jules Monchanin*: Mystique de l'Inde, mystere chretien"* p. 27.

[98] *Letters*, p. 177 (AMS 29.1.66).

[99] *Guru*, p. 45.

[100] *Intériorité*, p. 41, ft. 4.

[101] *Guru*, p. 63.

[102] *Saccidānanda*, p. 131.

[103] *Diary*, p. 45 (8.6.52).

Abhishiktānanda refers to the 'Beyond' in his last *Diary* entry. The Beyond is a brilliance, a light and a glory that both "envelops" everything and transcends it.[104]

Abhishiktānanda makes a distinction between immanence in a single object or form (which he rejects) and immanence in all forms, which he calls *sarvarūpa*. We must not localize the Transcendent in any one form:

> …holiness does not embody itself in any form, *a-rūpa*, it is in all forms [*sarva rūpa*]. But there is no *sarvarūpa*, total immanence, except where there is *a-rūpa*, total transcendence.[105]

It is unclear where he obtains the term "total immanence." It is that the term is related to his idea of *nāmarūpa*. Individual things are *nāmarūpa*, names and forms that are all relative. All of these must be surpassed, and it is idolatry to try to locate the Absolute within any object or concept. But when we pass beyond the *nāmarūpa*, the mystery takes all forms [*sarvarūpam*].[106] On this reading, the Beyond is related to the relativity of all our concepts.

This is really an existential interpretation of the Beyond–the Beyond is that which allows us to distinguish between Being and beings. Beings are only *nāmarūpa*. We may compare this to Heidegger's idea of transcendence. Mehta says it is the ground of the Ontological Difference; it is by virtue of this transcendence that we can distinguish between Being and beings and so relate ourselves to essents in the light of his comprehension of Being.[107]

There is at least one reference where Abhishiktānanda specifically says that the 'Beyond' should rather be seen in existential terms. Abhishiktānanda uses Tillich's term of "ultimate concern":

> [Religious dialogue] aims at the ultimate concern of man, the point where man is related to the *beyond*–whatever name may be given to it–not however to a *beyond* turned into an object of speculative contemplation and brought into discussion,

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[104] *Diary*, p. 388 (12.9.73). See also "Foi, sens d'au-dela" (unpublished 71.06.27).

[105] *Diary*, p. 251 (21.2.63).

[106] *Diary*, p. 361 (1.11.72).

[107] J.L. Mehta: *Martin Heidegger: The Way and the Vision* (University Press of Hawaii, 1976), p. 325.

> but the *beyond* which is the existential concern of man in regard to his own personal and 'eternal' destiny.[108]

To say that the Beyond must not be turned into an object of speculative contemplation is a rejection of a two level view of reality. Our ultimate concern and personal and 'eternal' destiny seems to be a reference to whether or not there is a continuing existence after death.

In *Further Shore*, Abhishiktānanda refers to the Beyond as an *eschaton* (a transcendent finality). But this Beyond is already present, "something permanent in the midst of all that passes away, deeper than words, deeper than acts, deeper than all exterior relationships among men."[109] The Beyond is here seen as something permanent in the midst of change. Again, Abhishiktānanda is trying to affirm both change and permanence.

Abhishiktānanda calls this the discovery of our 'a-seity'. We tend to project this aseity onto God. It may be objected that this idea of absoluteness springs up from our experience of finitude and incompleteness. Abhishiktānanda's answer is that, although we experience ourselves as finite, this very experience of finitude is itself rooted in the infinite:

> But this very experience of finitude can only be rooted in an experience of infinity that is deep, primordial, imperceptible in itself. The flash of realization is precisely this discovery of infinity, *illimitedness*, in the depth of, at the very source of, this finitude. The same thing as discovering my pure I, in itself, in the depth of, at the source of, my I-with, my I-acting, thinking, feeling, etc. It is like the extraction of what is deepest in oneself out of what is deepest in oneself.[110]

To say that infinity is at the very source of our finitude could be interpreted as a two level view of reality. But I do not think that this is Abhishiktānanda's intent. The pure 'I' is at the very depth of our feeling, thinking, and acting. It is not opposed to them, but is immanent in them. This importance of the temporal is discussed in more detail under the heading, "The Importance of Time."

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[108] Abhishiktānanda: "The Depth-Dimension of Religious Dialogue", *Vidyajyoti* (1981) Vol. 45 No. 5, p. 204. He does not make explicit reference to Tillich.

[109] *Further Shore*, p. 31.

[110] *Diary*, p. 374 (16.4.73). Contrast this with Loy's view of the experience of self as a "lack". David Loy: *Lack and Transcendence* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1966).

b) The cave of the heart

The Self or *Brahman* is transcendent to phenomena, but it is also totally immanent within these phenomena. The *advaitic* experience is that of an "Ascent to the Depth" of the heart. It is of a transcendence experienced immanently in the heart. Abhishiktānanda speaks of the "cave of the heart." The phrase "depth of the heart" ("au sein du fond") was coined by some French sisters to translate the phrase "*hridayakuharamaddhye"* in the following *śloka* from the *Sri Ramana Gita II.*

> In the centre of the Heart-cave, Brahman shines alone. It is the form of Self experienced directly as 'I'-'I'. Enter the Heart, through self-enquiry or merging or by breath-control and become rooted in that.[111]

Abhishiktānanda says that this cave of the heart, or *gūhā*, is the source of everything:

> That *guhā* is what is beyond the reach of sense or thought. It is the "abode of *Brahman*", the very place of the *ātman* itself, the truest self of man. It is the source of everything in the *macrocosmos*, which is the whole universe, and in the *microcosmos*, which is man himself.[112]

In the heart is an experience of both the relative and the limitless, both beyond and within every limit, the sacred, the numinous, which is revealed in the ultimate secret of all.[113] Abhishiktānanda sees the universe in this heart, and the Self in the heart of the universe.[114]

The idea of the Self in "the heart" is certainly common in Hindu thought. The *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* I.2. 1-8 talks about a self "in the heart." Other references are in the *Chāndogya* Upanishad III.14 and the Katha Upanishad I.2.11-12. Shankara says that *Brahman* "in the heart" is a form in which we are to meditate upon *Brahman*, because it is like the case of *ākāśa*.[115]

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[111] *Diary*, p. 81, ft. 59. See *Ramana* Gita (Bangalore: Ramana Maharshi Centre for Learning, 1994), p. 19 (II, 2). See also *Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, p. 80, where he cites the Yoga Vashista, and refers to the Heart of all the individuals of the world.

[112] *Prayer*, p. 54.

[113] *Letters*, p. 329 (15.4.73).

[114] "Yoga and Christian Prayer" p. 475 Isa Up 6, Chan 3,12.

[115] Karl H. Potter, ed.: *Advaita Vedānta up to Śaṃkara and His Pupils* (Princeton, 1981), pp. 133, 134.

c) Natural/Supernatural

In his early writings, Abhishiktānanda interprets the supernatural in terms of the total transcendence of God.

> The supernatural is God in himself. Hence God in his incommunicability, in his simplicity, in his *kevala*.[116]

In later writings, Abhishiktānanda says that all Being is supernatural.[117] The fact that something *is* is a sign of grace:

> Everything is truth and everything is grace, because everything *is*. And everything sings of Being, by its existence itself, and by its individual existence and by the harmony of its existence with other beings. And there is only one existence; the harmony of Being or of beings is Being itself.[118]

Still later, Abhishiktānanda repudiates any distinction at all between these two levels, or between the natural and the supernatural. He was surprised when others reminded him of these views:

> It even gives me a start when you or Mother F-T repeat them back to me, such as that Grace equals Nature.[119]

Finally, Abhishiktānanda refers to *advaita* as the simple reality all around us:

> The discovery of the mystery is so much simpler than that. It is right beside you, in the opening of a flower the song of a bird, the smile of a child.[120]

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[116] *Diary*, p. 54 (10.9.52).

[117] *Diary*, p. 161 (12.11.56): "whatever is *Sat* is supernatural."

[118] *Guhāja*, p. 20, (my translation). See "Révélation cosmique et révélation dans le Christ", *Intériorité*, p. 258: The sacred is not superimposed but is within things.

[119] *Letters*, p. 132 (TL 17.12.60).

[120] *Letters*, p. 311

B. Trinitarianism

1. Monchanin's trinitarianism

According to Ysabel de Andia, Monchanin considered the problem of the One and the Many to be the true axis of thought.[121] One of his first communications to the Societé Lyonnaise de Philosophie was in 1931, and it was entitled "l'Un dans le multiple, dans le Parménide de Platon."[122]

Monchanin says that the problem of the One and the Many leads to the dilemma of monism vs. pluralism. If only the One is real, the result is monism. If only the Many are real, then there is pluralism. Other dilemmas that Monchanin believed resulted from this problem are personal/impersonal; monotheism/polytheism. Monchanin believed that only the idea of the Trinity goes beyond these dilemmas. In the Trinity there is neither only unity nor is there only diversity.

Monchanin thought that the Vedāntic idea of *advaita* was an equivalent form of thought to the Trinity.[123] Just as the Trinity is neither one nor three (it is not tritheism), so *advaita* is neither monism nor dualism. Reality surpasses our reasoning or *logos*. There is both unity and diversity. The fact that diversity is real also means that neither solipsism nor idealism are true. Monchanin was not the first to apply trinitarian ideas to Hindu thought. Many years before, Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya (1861-1907) had done the same.[124] He compared the Trinity to the

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[121] Ysabel de Andia: "Jules Monchanin, La Mystique Apophatique et l'Inde", *Jules Monchanin: Regards croisés d'Occident et d'Orient* (Lyon: Profac-Credic 1997), p. 111. He writes about Parmenides' hypothesis of a pure One that is-not. He says that this hypothesis leads to apophaticism. (The quotation is from the French translation of Plato's *Parmenides*: "d'un pur qui n'est pas"). Another contribution was called "Comparative Mysticism"; it compared the Greek Plotinus and the Buddhist Asaṇga, the Moslem Al-Hallaj and St. John of the Cross. See Sten Rodhe: *Jules Monchanin: Pioneer in Christian-Hindu Dialogue* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1993), p. 9.

[122] *Abbé Monchanin: Lettres au Père Le Saux*, ed. Françoise Jacquin (Paris: Cerf, 1995), p. 72.

[123] R. Panikkar: "Le Project Monastique de Monchanin", *Jules Monchanin: Regards croisés d'Occident et d'Orient* (Lyon: Profac-Credic, 1997), p. 232: "l'équivalent homéomorphique".

[124] See "The Pioneering Contrubitons of Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya" in K.P. Aleaz: *Christian Thought through Advaita Vedānta* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1996), pp. 9-

Hindu idea of *Saccidānanda (Sat-chit-ānandam*). Monchanin refers to Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya in *Ermites*.[125]

Monchanin's emphasis on the Trinity clearly influenced Abhishiktānanda's own view of the trinitarian structure of reality. The Trinity was an important idea for both of them; even the ashram Shantivanam was called "The ashram of the Trinity." Monchanin's trinitarian ideas also help to explain Abhishiktānanda's view of *advaita* as non-monistic.

Monchanin's trinitarian ideas also explain his view of yoga. Yoga leads to the One, but is incomplete. It needs to be completed by the Christian revelation of the Trinity. For Monchanin, mysticism is the participation in the Trinitarian relation. This mysticism is an intuition that surpasses image and concept, a direct experience, not made by humans, but given by God.[126] In this Christian mysticism, the enstasy of yoga transubstantiates itself in the Spirit into pure ecstasy. The Hindu *kevala*, (aloneness, *esseulé*) is sublimated to trinitarian thought after a "crucifying dark night of the soul."[127]

Monchanin believed that *advaita* could not account for love (*bhakti*). Love involves a distinction between beings. According to *advaita*, love is in the realm of *māyā.* But as soon as we say "God is love", this is to confess a Trinity.[128]

Monchanin liked to say that he would not be Christian if the trinitarian revelation had not introduced him to a better knowledge of creation and of humans. The internal dynamism of Trinity and the infinite stability of the absolute alterity is reflected in creation, in the physical

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[125] "Note C", *Ermites*, p. 182.

[126] Ysabel de Andia: "Jules Monchanin, La Mystique Apophatique et l'Inde", *Jules Monchanin: Regards croisés d'Occident et d'Orient* (Lyon: Profac-Credic, 1997), p. 116. *Mystique de l'Inde, mystere chretien"*, p. 134.

[127] *Ibid.*, pp. 125-128.

[128] *Ibid*., pp. 133-135. Harvey Cox makes the same point. Love presupposes genuinely different selves. God and the world are both real, but different, and the relation between them is love. *Turning East* (Simon and Schuster, 1977), pp. 85,86.

universe as well as in human sociability.[129] In 1956, Monchanin said that Christian mysticism is trinitarian or nothing.[130]

Monchanin accompanied Abhishiktānanda to Arunāchala from mid-May to June, 1954. Monchanin did not stay in a cave but in a bungalow two kilometers away. He was worried about Abhishiktānanda. Each morning Abhishiktānanda came down to celebrate Mass with him. Monchanin asked Abhishiktānanda to try to pierce the *advaitic* experience to discover the communion (*samsat*) beyond. It is at this time that Abhishiktānanda writes that Monchanin is too Greek to understand *advaita*.

But as will become clear, Abhishiktānanda adopted many of these ideas of Monchanin. He also uses a trinitarian structure to explain the relation of the One to the Many. And he uses this idea of the *samsat* or communion with others. Monchanin could not know how some of his ideas would be adopted.[131] In the meantime, he was highly critical of some of Abhishiktānanda's ideas. When we examine these criticisms, some of Abhishiktānanda's own ideas become more apparent.

Abhishiktānanda's book *Guhāntara* was not accepted for publication by the censor. Monchanin wrote to Abhishiktānanda in 1955, suggesting the conditions under which he thought that *Guhāntara* was publishable.[132] He criticizes Abhishiktānanda for not having any explicit ontology in the book, and suggests that Abhishiktānanda has not sufficiently separated God and creation. Monchanin is absolutely opposed to any idea of creation being an emanation from God. The distinction between God and the world is to be found in the doctrine of creation, which Monchanin thinks is also put in danger by Abhishiktānanda's ideas. He also says that Abhishiktānanda has not given enough importance to the historicity of time. Finally, Monchanin

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[129] Jacques Gadille: "Jules Monchanin: Prophète dans la Culture et dans l'Église de son Temps" pp. 39, 43. *Jules Monchanin: Regards croisés d'Occident et d'Orient* (Lyon: Profac-Credic, 1997),p. 39.

[130] Sten Rodhe: "De la vision inclusive de Jules Monchanin à la vision complémentaire de Bede Griffiths", *Jules Monchanin: Regards croisés d'Occident et d'Orient* (Lyon: Profac-Credic, 1997), p. 224.

[131] See for example, *Diary*, p. 358 (3.8.72): "I am, according to the trinitarian model, indivisibly non-dual and in communion [*samsat*], "both" of them, the one through the other."

[132] *Abbé Monchanin: Lettres au Père Le Saux*, ed. Françoise Jacquin (Paris: Cerf, 1995), p. 165. Jan 6/55. Bayart's criticism of the book is in a letter of January 17, 1955. He says that Abhishiktānanda's use of Sankhya terminology like *vyakta* and *avyakta* imply a becoming, of future in God himself. But as we have seen, Hacker finds this term in the Upanishads.

contrasts experiences of fullness with experiences of emptiness. For there to be fullness, the *advaitic* experience must be superceded by the Christian trinitarian experience.

These criticisms will now be examined in more detail.

2. Abhishiktānanda's trinitarianism

a) The One and the Many

Like Monchanin, Abhishiktānanda specifically says that the Trinity solves the problem of the One and the Many:

> Here at last we find resolved the antinomy of the One and the Many, which obsessed the thinkers of Greece, and also the antinomy of the *an-eka* and the *a-dvaita*, the not-one and the not-two, which obsesses the Indian seers. In the perspective of the Trinity one is never so profoundly close to oneself as in the heart of another.[133]

The doctrine of the Trinity helps us to avoid a both dualism and monism. The Word is both with God as well as God himself:

> If the Word is God, we cannot say *two* (in a numerical sense) of him and the Father; there is no place left for any division, duality, *dvaita* of any kind. But if the Word is with God, then God is not a mere monad either.[134]

The indistinguishability between *Brahman* and the world does not necessarily mean their identity.

> He [God] is not-two, he is not-one, how to reconcile these escapes me. We must deny in God the human *one* and the human *two*."[135]

According to Abhishiktānanda, the mystery of Being therefore transcends not only our thought but even numeration.[136]

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[133] *Saccidānanda*, p. 185.

[134] *Saccidānanda*, p. 84.

[135] *Diary,* p. 29 (31.3.52).

[136] *Diary*, p. 54 (10.9.52). Cf. Olivier Lacombe: "La philosophie chrétienne dit pareillement [à le Vedānta] que de la créature à Dieu et l'universe créé ne s'additionnent pas, ne font pas une somme, que l'existence du finit n'ajoute rien à l'Infini. " (*L'Absolu selon le Vedanta*). In "Dans Le Centre Le Plus Profond", *Guhāntara* (unpublished).Abhishiktānanda makes this same point–that there is no numeration in the *advaitic* state.

> Yet between God and the human person there is nothing that could be counted. I do not say that the human being is God or that God is the human being, but I deny that the human being plus God makes two.[137]

Abhishiktānanda says that this experience of both identity and diversity is ineffable [*a-nirvacanīya*].[138] It is not to be explained in terms of either unity or of difference.

> There is the non-unity of God and the human being. And there is their non-duality–and there is what is at the same time beyond non-unity and beyond non-duality.[139]

He says that this mystery of the trinity is something that India and even its most strong *yogis* could not discover. The trinitarian experience goes beyond and transcends the experience of Hindu *jñānis*.[140] The logical conclusion of Vedānta does not allow for the existence of humanity. It is only in the Trinity that the human being truly *is.*

> In the presence of God the human being is not. God alone is. And no room is left for the human being. That is the logical conclusion of Vedānta.[141]

But Abhishiktānanda does not take Vedānta to its logical conclusion. He believes that that would be an overuse of logic. He reinterprets Vedāntic terms in terms of the experience of One and Many:

> Recognize this glory [the glory of the Father] can be recognized in the very mystery of his manifestation, *vyakti*, that mystery which the Jews called Messiah–the Greeks Word, Lord [*logos*, *kurios*], etc. The mystery which here has been called: *guhā, purusha,* the inner self [*antarātman*]*,* the Word, [*vāc*]*,* and in Vedic times, the goal. [*padam*].[142]

By the doctrine of the Trinity**,** we do not have to deny the many in order to affirm the One. The mystery that we are cannot be confused with anything nor with any form, for it is non-form and all-form at the same time, *a-rūpa* and *sarvarūpa.*[143] The Self is 'unique and non-dual'. But it is nevertheless revealed in the multiplicity of conscious beings. Both *Brahman* and Its

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[137] *Diary,* p. 151 (5.7.56).

[138] *Diary,* p. 375 (17.4.73). Abhishiktānanda here applies this Hindu term to the Trinitarian experience.

[139] *Diary*, p. 101 (9.4.55).

[140] *Saccidānanda*, p. 195.

[141] *Diary*, p. 232 (12.6.60).

[142] *Diary*, pp. 310, 311 (23.3.70).

[143] "Appel à l'intériorité", *Intériorité*, p. 175, ft. 47.

manifestations are real. This reality of both the One and the Many is a mystery. For this mystery, the only appropriate word is *advaita*. It is not monism nor dualism but "that sheer mystery in which man, without understanding it at all, rediscovers himself in the depth of the heart of God."[144]

b) Is there a trinitarianism within Hinduism?

It is clear that Abhishiktānanda's ideas are trinitarian. Does this mean that Abhishiktānanda's fundamental ideas remain Christian, despite his use of *advaitic* terminology? Or can we find the analogous trinitarian ideas in at least some Hindu *advaitic* thought?

Abhishiktānanda does see some similarity to trinitarianism in the Hindu idea of *Saccidānanda* [Being-Consciousness-Bliss]. *Brahman* is sometimes described in this way. Abhishiktānanda says that *Sat-Cit-ananda* in Christian terms is the flux and reflux in God of the Trinity and of Unity.[145] He also quotes the Mundaka Upanishad for an idea analogous to the Trinity. It says that in the light of the *ātman*, all beings are food, relationship for the other. Abhishiktānanda's interpretation of this is that things do not exist separately in the area of the light of *ātman*, nor are they distinguished from that light. But they are for one another.[146]

The *tantric* work *Tripura Rahasya* also contains some ideas that are analogous to Abhishiktānanda's ideas about the Trinity. As already mentioned, the English translation of this work contains the subtitle: "The Mystery Beyond the Trinity."[147] According to this work, the Pure Self sometimes unfolds itself as the cosmos, and at other times withdraws Itself and remains unmanifest. Therefore Cosmos and the Self are only the same, but different modes of the one Reality which is Consciousness.[148] The Cosmos is therefore not unreal. It is real in the same way that an image in a mirror is real; the Cosmos is a real image of the Self.

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[144] *Guru*, p. 42.

[145] *Guhāja*, p. 85. He refers to Ruysbroeck's *Royaume des amants de Dieu* ch. 25.

[146] *Diary*, p. 348 (11.5.72). Mund. Up. III, 1,1.

[147] *Tripura Rahasya: The Mystery Beyond the Trinity* , tr. Swami Sri Ramanananda Saraswathi (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramanasramam, 1989). It is attributed to Dattatreya, the *guru of Patañjali.*

[148] *Ibid*. Chapter XI, verse 85 says, "That which shines as 'Is' is Her Majesty the Absolute Consciousness. Thus the universe is only the *Self–the One* and one only."

A kind of trinitarian thought is certainly present within neo-Hinduism. As we shall see, Aurobindo speaks of the evolution of the (real) world from *Brahman* through the *śakti* of *Brahman*. However, it may be argued that Aurobindo was influenced by Christian idea in his education, and that he used these ideas in his elaboration of Hindu ideas.

Abhishiktānanda explores other parallels between Hindu thought and Christian trinitarianism in his book *Saccidānanda*, where he suggests that the Christian idea of the Trinity supplements the Hindu idea of *advaita*. By 1972, he rejects this idea of supplement or fulfillment. He says that the Trinity is not some words added on to the message of the Upanishads, for there is no word [*vākya*] beyond the *mahāvākyas.*[149] And by 1973, he explicitly rejects the possibility of the development of a new Trinitarian theology. He believes that such a new theology would be to remain enchanted in the world of myths and logos. It would be replacing *Theos* by *theo-logia*. He says that the awakening to the mystery has nothing to do with the dogmas of the Trinity, Incarnation, Redemption, or finding equivalences to the mystery of Jesus in Indian terms like avatars or *Purusha*.[150]

Instead of beginning with theological ideas and searching for equivalences in Hindu thought, Abhishiktānanda says that he wants to begin with the *advaitic* experience itself.

> The whole subject should be taken up again, starting from the Vedantin experience, and not–as I have so far done, or rather written–from the "Christian faith" and its "symbolization" [in Creeds] by the [Ecumenical] Councils; like a kind of hypothesis which is followed through to the end.[151]

The experience or *anubhava* is now fundamental for him. Whatever is said about the experience is relative. The *advaitic* experience cannot be captured in any words. This inadequacy of words also extends to what is said in Christian doctrines. Abhishiktānanda had by this time accepted Panikkar's idea that Christianity is only one view among others. Therefore, we cannot speak in terms of fulfillment.

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[149] *Diary*, p. 351 (20.5.72).

[150] *Diary*, p. 367 (2.2.73).

[151] *Letters*, p. 270 (OB 23.12.70).

c) Emanation from the One

Monchanin was absolutely opposed to any emanation theory that says that the diversity of the world comes "out of" the One. He criticizes Abhishiktānanda's doctrine of emanation. He says that any doctrine of emanation will involve some commonality of Being (*sat*) between the One and the Many. If Being is common to both God and humanity then we will end up either degrading God (as in the *pariṇāma*) view, or we will deny creation (as in the *vivarta* view). In the first case, there is a denial of God's transcendence, and the result is pantheism. In the second case, there is a denial of the reality of the world. He wanted Abhishiktānanda to affirm the distinction ("alterity") between God and the world, between eternal and temporal, between Being and becoming.

Because of his emphasis on *advaita*, Abhishiktānanda is reluctant to speak of the creation of the world in terms of 'emanation'. He says that 'emanation' presupposes a difference between that which emanates and that which is emanated:

> The creature is not something placed by God outside himself, nor something emanating from God which would be from the divine or from God, at a second level. The being of the creature is in the "very depth" of God.[152]

And yet Abhishiktānanda does have an emanation theory of the world. There is an "issuing" forth or projecting from God:

> God in his eternity mysteriously '*issues'* [projects] me from his *śūnyatā* [emptiness, void]. It is also from his Love that I have issued. His love in creating me seeks me, and in seeking me seeks himself. He seeks to encounter himself.[…} It is from the Love of the Father that the Son and the whole of creation has issued forth.[153]

God "projects" himself endlessly in space and time into individual consciousnesses.[154] The world is the "projection" in space and time of this consciousness of the Self.[155]

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[152] *Diary*, p. 240 (1961).

[153] *Diary*, p. 46 (12.6.52). In "Dans Le Centre Le Plus Profond", *Guhāntara* (unpublished), Abhishiktānanda says that the Father is nondual, and manifests in the not-one, the *aneka* of the Son and Spirit. The Father is the unmanifested (*avyakta*) who manifests (*vyakta*) in the Son and Spirit, in the Word (*Vāk) and in the Breath emitted in prouncing it (*prāna*).*

[154] *Diary*, p. 318 (20.8.70).

Abhishiktānanda describes this emanation in trinitarian terms. The One is the "Father". The Father is the Principle, the source and origin. All the rest is a "development" from Him, both as a whole and in detail.[156] The Father is the not-manifested, the not-extended, the not-dispersed [*avyakta*, *avyāpta*, *akshara*].[157] The Son and the rest of the world come from Him.

Abhishiktānanda also sees the manifestation of the Many as being brought about by the *śakti* of *Brahman*. He says that this *śakti* is just as real as *Brahman*. It is within all of us, but it is not different from the self:

> There is within us a force, a reality that we do not suspect: *śakti*, spirit. A force that is not different from the self *[ātmanā na vyatiriktah].*[158]

Monchanin believed that this idea of *śakti* and *Brahman* being different forms of the same Being is an emanation theory of being. In a letter to Abhishiktānanda dated November 19, 1953, Monchanin compares the doctrine of *Sivādvaita*, where Shiva and *Śakti* refer to the same being under different forms, with Valentine's *gnosis*. He compares Shiva and *Śakti* to Valentine's idea of the primordial *syzygie* or primordial couple. All emanation is from them. In this gnostic system, each male eon is doubled by a feminine one emanated from him, representing his phenomenal face [159]

For Abhishiktānanda, the *śakti* manifests itself in the play of *Brahman*. This play is both evolution, a movement outwards to the manifestation of particulars, and involution, a movement inwards back to the One. There are two movements or "processions" in God. One is the movement outwards, expanding the Self, the other is the return to the Self.[160] In the procession

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[155] *Diary*, p. 317 (1.9.69). This particular passage reflects a rather idealist view of the world. Abhishiktānanda says that the world is not a datum that precedes the mind, its reality is wholly dependent on the participation in the infinite act–in nonduality of being.

[156] *Diary*, p. 234 (19.7.60).

[157] *Diary*, p. 289 (19.11.66).

[158] *Diary*, p. 381 (10.5.73).

[159] Abbé Monchanin: *Lettres au Père Le Saux*, ed. Françoise Jacquin (Paris: Cerf, 1995), p. 123.In *Ermites du Saccidananda*, "Note D: *Māyā*", Monchanin Valenitne's *gnosis*. Here he refers to the return to the One: thre is a leaving of the "*Kenoma"* ["*kénôme},* from *kenosis*] to enter into the joy of the "Pleroma".

[160] "L'Inde et le Carmel", p. 120.

of the Son, God's otherness is revealed. In the procession of the Spirit, it is God's unity that is revealed.[161] The return is the return to fullness, or *pleroma.*[162]

> *Śakti* is *māyā*. *Māyā* is the self-emptying [*kenosis*] of the Spirit, the Spirit self-emptied in its evolutionary function…But *māyā* is also *śakti* in its function of involution, of returning to the one. Dispersal in the *aneka* [the multiple], concentration in the *a-dvaita*. […]
> *Śakti* is the Spirit, the power causing the universe to evolve in its *kenosis*; the power bringing back all to the Son and to the Father in its enstasis. The world veiled in order to unveil…
> *Māyā, śakti,* scatters and reunites, disintegrates and reintegrates.
> The mystery of the Virgin, the *śakti* in whom the universe gives birth to the Son.{…}
> Grace is the turning of *māyā* into *śakti*, of the power of extasis into the power of enstasis. In this sense Bhagavan said that grace is the *kundalini śakti*.[163]

The *śakti* of *Brahman* is thus interpreted in Christian terms as a *kenosis* or emptying of God.[164] *Śakti* is the power of God, the mystery of the Virgin, in bringing to birth the Son (diversity) from the Father.[165]

Within Shaivism, Abhishiktānanda sees the Shivalinga as a symbol of this evolution and involution:

> The Shivalinga is the symbol of God's coming into his creation and equally the symbol of the creature's passing, his departure into God…The Shivalinga stands between form and non-form, rupa-arupa, between manifestation and what can never be manifested.[166]

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[161] *Meeting Point*, p. 88.

[162] *Saccidānanda*, p. 135.

[163] *Diary*, p. 79 (5.12.53). The idea of evolution and involution may have been derived from Eckhart. We know that Abhishiktānanda read Otto's *Mysticism East and West* (New York: Macmillan, 1970; first published 1932). Otto discusses Eckhart's ideas of emanation and return. (see p. 188).

[164] Abhishiktānanda says that Man is the kenosis of being. All of creation without doubt is the state of kenosis of being. "Esseulement", *Intériorité*, p. 134.

[165] Hermann Gunkel pointed out in 1888 that the New Testament □□□□□□ means, not "*Geist*" in the sense of idealism, but rather God's miraculous power and manner of action. H. Gunkel, *Die Wirkungen des Heiligen Geist nach der populären Anschauung der apostoloischen Zeit und der Lehre des Apostel Paul* (1888; erd ed., 1909), cited by Rudolf Bultmann: "Is Exegesis without Presuppositions possible?" *The Hermeneutics Reader*, ed. Kurt Mueller-Voelmer (Continuum, 1988)p. 243.

[166] *Guru*, p. 42.

d) Univocal/analogical Being

(1) Pantheism/Panentheism

Is Monchanin correct that if there is emanation of the universe from the One, this leads to pantheism? Monchanin believed that Rāmānuja's views were more pantheistic than those of Shankara. He says that Shankara could not be a pantheist, because he believed that the world is unreal.[167] Monchanin wanted to avoid both views. The first part of *A Benedictine Ashram* consists of Monchanin's attempted refutation of pantheism.[168]

It is helpful here to make a distinction between pantheism and panentheism. Krüger explains this distinction in the following way: Pantheism is the aggregate of nature. A panentheistic view of God is different; in such a view, God is the depth of the dynamic universe. God is equivalent to the interrelatedness of the universe.[169]

Abhishiktānanda uses panentheistic language when he refers to creation as being "in God":

> There is nothing outside of God; therefore, if it is and in the measure that it is, the creature is in God.[170]

And, in another passage, he compares this idea with the substance/accident problem in scholastic theology.

> How does the accident subsist? The divine penetrates to the most exterior, the most superficial, the most accidental of being, like the most intimate atoms of the substance. Not "all is God" like the pantheist, but rather, "There is nothing but God."[171]

Elsewhere, Abhishiktānanda refers to God as the centre of the world:

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[167] Rodhe, Sten: "De la vision inclusive de Jules Monchanin à la vision complémentaire de Bede Griffiths" in *Jules Monchanin: Regards croisés d'Occident et d'Orient* (Lyon: Profac-Credic, 1997), p. 223.

[168] Monchanin and Abhishiktānanda: *A Benedictine Ashram*. Monchanin does not like Otto's pantheistic interpretation of Eckhart. Eckhart sees Trinity as effulgence from primordial Unity. His mysticism is a return to this Unity. *Jules Monchanin: Mystique de l'Inde, mystere chretien*, ed. Suzanne Siauve (Paris: Fayard, 1974), pp. 127-8.

[169] Krüger: *Along Edges*, pp. 39, 184.

[170] *Guhāja*, p. 82.

[171] "Ehieh Asher Ehieh", *Intériorité*, p. 86.

> God is at the centre of that centre of the world which I am for myself; and God is likewise the "limit" of that sphere into which I project myself in the world around me.[172]

This is the seeing of *Brahman* within everything that is characteristic of the *sahaja* state. Abhishiktānanda says, "All this, it is myself" and "God is the centre who is everywhere and who is nowhere"[173]

(2) The Great Chain of Being

Does the idea of emanation lead to the idea of the "Great Chain of Being", as Western mystics have suggested? Is there a commonality of "substance" or of Being between the One and the Many? This way of thinking goes back at least to Plotinus.

Olivier Lacombe tried to show a historical relation between Plotinus' *Ennéades* and Indian thought. Monchanin also tried to show this.[174] In Plotinus, there is a procession [*proodos*] of the multiple from the One, and a return [*epistrophé*] of the multiple to the One.[175] Their union [*henosis*] is experienced as extasy, extase.

Loy refers to Plotinus on the first page of *Nondualism*. He sees a reference there to a kind of nondual perception:

> It is a knowing of the self restored to its purity. No doubt we should not speak of seeing; but we cannot help talking in dualities, seen and seer, instead of, boldly, the achievement of unity.[176]

Abhishiktānanda does not follow Plotinus blindly. He says that the notion of the One was different for Aristotle, Plato and Plotinus. Even Plotinus did not do what India did: give up the idea of thought as definitive truth.[177]

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[172] *Diary*, p. 104 (6.7.55).

[173] *Diary*, p. 208 (10.5.57). Jung also makes frequent reference to Silesius.

[174] Ysabel de Andia: "Jules Monchanin, La Mystique Apophatique et l'Inde", *Jules Monchanin: Regard croisés d'Occident et d'Orient* (Lyon: Profac-Credic 1997),p. 112 ft. 10. She cites Lacombe's *L'expérience du Soi. Étude de mystique comparé* (Paris, 1981), pp. 51-84. There are several references to Plotinus in *Ermites du Saccidananda*. For example, p. 113 ft. 1 refers to *Ennádes* VI, 9: the flight of the one towards the One.

[175] In *Guhāntara*, Abhishiktānanda refers to Plotinus. He also expressly refers to emanation from the One by way of *kenosis* and dispersion and by way of return of everything again to the Father by the Spirit. Abhishiktānanda refers to these two movements as extasy and enstasy. "Dans Le Centre Le Plus Profond" (unpublished).

[176] Plotinus, *Sixth Ennead IX.10*, cited in *Nonduality*, p. 1.

But can we really say that there is a commonality of Being between God and the world? Mehta says that *Brahman* does not belong to any class or genus and cannot be denoted by word *sat*. [178] William Jackson comments:

> The concepts of subject, ground and enduring presence, in terms of which Being has been conceived since Plato, are utterly inadequate to the truth of Being itself.[179]

If Being is not a common denominator between the One and the Many, then what do we call it? Do we call it the "Hyperion" as the Presocratics did? Mehta asks, if *Brahman* is "that from which, by which and into which, all this arises, is sustained and returns," is this Anaximander all over again?[180]

Can we say that consciousness is a common denominator between the One and the Many? Wilber speaks of Consciousness as the Great Chain of Being.[181] Sometimes Abhishiktānanda speaks of Consciousness in this way, as being the ground of everything. He says that God is Pure Consciousness, "*Śuddha Caitanya*".[182] The world is the "projection" in space and time of this consciousness of the Self.[183]

In a late *Diary* entry, Abhishiktānanda warns against conceiving the unmanifested *sat* on the basis of what is manifested and he refers to the criticism of Mādhyamika Buddhists on this point. But he also says that we must be careful not to set some other truth against the truth of this world.[184] Being cannot be conceived in terms of beings. And yet Abhishiktānanda does not want to set up two levels of reality that are wholly unconnected with each other.

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[177] *Guhāja*, p. 78.

[178] J.L. Mehta: "Heidegger and Vedanta", *India and the Wes*t: The Problem of Understanding, (Harvard, 1985), p. 249.

[179] William J. Jackson, Prelude to *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition* (New York: Brill, 1992), p. 3.

[180] J.L. Mehta: "Heidegger and Vedanta", *India and the Wes*t: The Problem of Understanding, (Harvard, 1985), p. 244.

[181] Ken Wilber: "'The Great Chain of Being", *Paths Beyond Ego*, ed. Roger Walsh and Frances Vaughan (New York: Tarcher, 1993), p. 214 ff.

[182] *Diary*, p. 36 (5.4.52). The editor's footnote 30 refers to Shankara's *Upadeśasahasri* II, 1,1.

[183] *Diary*, p. 317 (1.9.70).

[184] *Diary*, p. 373 (13.4.73).

(3) The Analogy of Being

Monchanin speaks of the analogy of Being. In this doctrine, there is no commonality of Being, but only an analogy between two levels of reality. He says that most Indians promptly transpose an analogy to an identity.[185] To safeguard this difference between God and world, Monchanin also affirms the doctrine that the creation by God is *ex nihilo*, out of 'nothing.'

Instead of creation *ex nihilo*, Abhishiktānanda speaks of God creating from out of His potentiality, or His *śūnyatā*:

> Nothingness does not exist, that is a truism. Ultimately is not *śūnyatā* [the void] the abyss of the Deity? *Śunyatā* is the "potentiality" of which God is the act, if we may risk this crude analogy.[186]

But this potentiality or abyss is not the same as *creatio ex nihilo*. Such a 'nothing' would necessarily but impossibly be other than God, other than Being.[187]

> To say that God made me out of nothing makes no more sense than to say that God himself is made out of nothing. I no more come from nothing than God comes from nothing. "I am", *Aham asmi.* and the 'I' is essentially trinitarian…This mystery of the same and the other which I bear within myself.[188]

Abhishiktānanda is clear that his view of Being is one of *kenosis*, which is a self-emptying of God's own Being. Thus it is not a view of analogy of being:

> By extension the notion of *kenosis* is sometimes used to express the self-emptying of Being when it passes into (contingent) being, and as it were divests itself of its plenitude and indivisibility in order to become multiple and finite. To those who argue that being is analogical and not univocal we can at least reply that the doctrine of *creation ex nihilo* raises far more problems than it solves.[189]

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[185] *Lettres au Père Le Saux ed. Françoise Jacquin* (Paris: Cerf, 1995), p. 23 (to J. Maillet, 10.12.55)

[186] *Diary*, p. 52, (2.8.52).

[187] "The Upanishads, an Introduction", *Further Shore*, p. 87. But Abhishiktānanda does refer to the doctrine of creation *in principio*. "Appel à l'intériorité", *Intériorité*, p. 162. We may compare this to Eckhart's view that to see things in *principio* is to see them in their origin or principle, to see them in God, where all multiplicity and duality is eternal Unity. See Rudolf Otto: *Mysticism East and West* (Macmillan, 1970, first published 1932), p. 21.

[188] *Diary*, p. 102 (5.6.55).

[189] *Saccidānanda*, p. 132, ft. 1.

To say that God created out of nothing would add something to God. "Creation adds nothing to God, to Being. Nothing that is can ever be anything but a manifestation of God, a manifestation that occurs within the very depths of God."[190]

Abhishiktānanda therefore repudiates the analogy of being. His reason for this is that the analogy of being separates God too much from creation. It involves the dualistic notion of the natural world somehow participating in the supernatural. But, says Abhishiktānanda, this does not resolve the problem.

> As long as God is considered from one side and the creature from the other, there is no solution. Nothing is other than God. The relation of God with the creature is not real except from the side of the creature.[191]

The emphasis here is on the *kevala* experience, where nothing is other than God. Dupuis sees a basic contradiction here in Abhishiktānanda. He says that Abhishiktānanda was guided by the analogy of being; but he also repudiated any such analogy as being dualist.[192] If there is a contradiction, it is the same one that we have referred to before, between *Brahman* conceived as not in relation to the world and *Brahman* in relation to the world. There is a problem in referring to the Transcendent except in terms of the manifested. Being cannot be explained in terms of beings. Does that mean that there is an analogy?

Hacker compares the Indian idea of *Brahman* to the analogy of being.[193] The two doctrines have in common that they distinguish between absolute and contingent entities—absolute is simpler–and they share the idea that the contingent being is upheld by the absolute being alone. But Hacker warns that Indians did not have the same history as the West of a concept of being. They made no distinction between existence and essence; *that* a thing is and *what* it is were for Indians the same; there was therefore no possibility of the analogy of being.[194] The difference between them is in the idea of creation. For Vedānta, the existence of the world is inexplicable. *Brahman* is a cause of the world only through *māyā*. For the

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190 *Meeting Point*, p. 87.

191 *"Présence de Dieu-Présence à Dieu"*, *Intériorité*, p. 141.

192 J. Dupuis, SJ: Introduction to *Intérioreté*, p. 30.

193 Paul Hacker: "Being and Spirit in Vedānta", *Philology and Confrontation*, pp. 202, 205.

194 *Ibid.* p. 188.

Vedāntist, the Absolute is pure light without any content that might be determined by means of analogy from the contingent world.

3. God's Freedom of Creation

Monchanin emphasizes the importance of the Biblical idea of creation. In a letter to Abhishiktānanda of April 22, 1954 he says that *Guhāntara* can be revised without much difficulty, particularly regarding the doctrine of creation.[195] Monchanin says that Hinduism must renounce the equation of ā*tman* and *Brahman* in order to enter in Christ. It is in the mystery of creation that *advaita* must die in order to be resurrected as Christian. He even says that for someone to believe that one's self is *Brahman* (*aham brāhma asmi*) is a mortal sin, and maybe even the sin against the Holy Spirit, especially if this belief persists after one knows the Christian revelation about God and the created world.[196]

For Monchanin, it is God's creation that makes the *difference* between the world and God. If God is only ONE, he cannot be creator.[197] Monchanin wanted to preserve the doctrine of God's freedom of creation–that God did not have to create the world.[198]

In contrast to this, Abhishiktānanda sometimes says that the manifestation of the Many was in some sense necessary:

> Is it necessary for *aham* to be expressed at the phenomenal level? (Yes) in the same way as Shiva had to appear to himself in his *śakti*.[199]

The traditional response to this view is that within the Trinity there was already an eternal communion, so God had no need to create. Abhishiktānanda's response is that in view of God's love, we must ask whether God could conceivably have held back from creating the universe.[200]

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[195] Abbé Monchanin: *Lettres au Père Le Saux*, ed. Françoise Jacquin (Paris: Cerf, 1995), p. 144.

[196] *Ibid.* p. 178 (23.1.55).

[197] Ysabel de Andia: "Jules Monchanin, La Mystique Apophatique et l'Inde", *Jules Monchanin: Regard croisés d'Occident et d'Orient* (Lyon: Profac-Credic 1997), p. 137.

[198] *Abbé Monchanin: Lettres au Père Le Saux*, ed. Françoise Jacquin (Paris: Cerf, 1995), p. 194 (22.4.54). Monchanin seemed to think that emanation means determinism. At p. 145 note 8 says that *parināmavi* gives no place to divine initiation but transforms the cause (God) into effect (man). He refers to Boehme as a "Christian Kabbalist".

[199] *Diary*, p. 316 (25.7.70).

But elsewhere, Abhishiktānanda says that it is important for the Christian to affirm and to safeguard both viewpoints:

> It is absolutely essential for him to safeguard, both in his thought and in his formulations of it, the complete liberty of God in his decision to create and the distinction between created being and the uncreated being of God. However, he must equally strongly affirm the *ekatvam*, the oneness of the mystery of God and the mystery of man.[201]

But Abhishiktānanda also says that the distinction between the freedom and essence of God is already *māyā*.[202]

4. The Importance of Time

Monchanin also wanted to stress the value of time as against Hinduism, which he believed regarded time as nothing.[203] He says that although classical Vedānta has its own dynamism in distinguishing the manifestations of matter and of life from the Infinite, these manifestations are not a real creation. There is a perpetual return to the One.[204] This places a higher priority on the eternal than on time. He writes to Abhishiktānanda that contemplation must not become uprooted from the world, the world where the Word became incarnate. The historicity of the world must not be evaded. In the letter, he capitalizes his words to shout out his emphasis:

> L'ADVAITA est une EVASION et même l'Inde NE VEUT PLUS D'´EVASION[205]

Abhishiktānanda does acknowledge that Christianity belongs to time. He says that Hinduism does not seek its perfection in time; it essentially opens onto non-time.[206]

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[200] *Saccidānanda*, pp. 116, 117. D*iary*, p. 145 (19.2.56): He asks whether the distinction between God's freedom and His essence is not already *māyā*. See also *Diary*, p. 223 (3.11.59): God is beyond necessity and freedom.

[201] *Meeting Point,* p. 66.

[202] *Diary*, p. 144 (19.2.56).

[203] *Abbé Monchanin: Lettres au Père Le Saux*, ed. Françoise Jacquin (Paris: Cerf, 1995), p. 145, note 9.

[204] *Ibid*. p. 104.

[205] *Ibid.* p. 148 (24.4.54).

[206] Abhishiktānanda refers to Oscar Cullman's *Christ and Time*: Christian time is a time that lasts for ever. Diary p. 152 (19.7.56). Abhishiktānanda says that eternity does not continue. It is the present. *Diary* p. 292 (27.1.67).

Abhishiktānanda's views on time and eternity vary depending on the emphasis he places on the *kevala* and the *sahaja* experiences. When he emphasizes the *kevala*, he emphasizes a view of eternity that minimizes the temporal. For example, he says that salvation means "to leave time" and to enter into eternity.[207] All that time is for is for the leap into the Eternal.[208]

Abhishiktānanda says that our duality in relation to the world and to the rest of what-with-me-is-and-has-being, cannot be final. This is essentially a matter of space and time. Our duality in relation to God is even less final. Until the end of his life, Abhishiktānanda believed that our origin is in non-time.[209] Time is only a category. It is contrasted with that which is beyond all change, the mystery of the I in the depths of consciousness.[210] The *advaitic* experience is that of the not-born–what is beyond all time, all place, all circumstance; in it alone you have an insight, a 'glimpse', a certain experience already of the Absoluteness of God.'[211] It is in the eternal that we attain the "I" of which the Katha Upanishad speaks. "It is neither born nor dies and is never killed."[212]

The *kevala* view is also linked to a view of symbol as referring beyond time.

> Myth has for its goal to transport outside of time and to allow one to live intemporality in a form that is temporal.[213]

On this view, neither time nor *eidos* is real with absolute reality.[214] But Abhishiktānanda recognizes that if time and eternity are on different levels, there is a problem for the *jīvanmukta*. The *jīvanmukta* must still live in time, since no one is free of manifestation.[215] In the following

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[207] *Diary*, 294 (5.3.67).

[208] *Letters*, p. 64 (L, 29.4.53).

[209] *Letters*, p. 280 (MT 18.12.72).

[210] *Letters*, p. 275 (L.26.8.72).

[211] *Letters*, p. 195 (TL, 17.10.67). *Diary*, p. 52 (2.8.52) "In *principio,* at that time which has nothing to do with duration, at a place which has nothing to do with space, the Logos alone was the non-dual *cit* [consciousness, mind]. There and then there was no distinction between object and subject."

[212] *Diary*, p. 273 (13.5.64). Abhishiktānanda refers to a book by Mouroux: *Le mystère du Temps*, which also speaks of an I that transcends time.

[213] "Jésus le Sauveur", *Intérioreté*, p. 276 ft. 1.

[214] *Diary*, p. 217 (4.6.58).

[215] "Theologoumenon Upasana: méditation sur la Trinité", *Intériorité*, (1970) p. 232

lengthy quotation, we can see Abhishiktānanda struggling with the idea of being both outside of time and within time:

> The Spirit is both in the eternal *nunc* and in each succeeding moment of time. Let us not confuse things. Either let ourselves go in the (temporal) current of the Spirit, carried off by him, changing with him who is multiform because formless. Or transcend the realm of space-time and deny the progression of time, not in favour of one of the fleeting instants of this progression, but in favour of non-succession, non-temporality, eternity. Or better still in the divine way, the way of the Spirit itself. Time and eternity are not mutually exclusive, any more than God and the creature, the Absolute and the relative. To be mutually exclusive, things have to be of the same order. Be at once in the eternal *nunc* [now] and in the sequence of time. In the *nunc* of being and in the moment of its manifestation. For the manifestation is really nothing other than Being itself.[…] God is completely and totally present in each of his manifestations (just as Christ is in every host and in every particle of the host). It is a moment in the ceaseless play [*līlā*] of the divine Wisdom playing upon the earth [*ludens in orbe terrarum*, Prov. 8:31] For every temporal "moment" is eternity. Eternity is entirely present in every moment of time, the absolute in every aspect, every phase of the relative. But the moment that lasts is no longer eternity, for eternity has no "duration," it is just "is." The moment that lasts is unreal, it has no meaning.[216]

In another model of time and eternity, Abhishiktānanda says that time is not opposed to eternity because the thou is not opposed to the I and because duality has its being in unity to which everything returns.[217] This view still emphasizes the unity to which everything returns.

In this *kevala* view, Abhishiktānanda regards time and space as themselves superimpositions that must be overcome:

> The *aham* is the superficial ego liberated from the *upādhis* [superimposed limitations] of *idam and kālam*, of space-time. This means regarding one's own "*deha*" from the viewpoint of eternity [*sub specie aeternitatis*], of the eternal *Nunc* [Now].[218]

The eternal Now is here seen in contrast to the temporal world:

> The eternal present is unattainable by those who are engaged in the whirlpool of samsāra. The West is fascinated by the future, what is not what may never be.[219]

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[216] *Diary*, p. 40 (8.4.52).

[217] *Guhāja*, p. 30.

[218] *Diary*, p. 42 (3.6.52).

[219] "Ehieh Asher Ehieh", *Intériorité*, p. 99.

But elsewhere Abhishiktānanda sees the eternal present in a way that affirms the importance of the temporal The simultaneous *advaita-aneka* [not-two, not-one], is discovered in the *nun* [now] of the Present.[220] God does not exist without the temporal. It is only in the manifestation of Being that the Father exists. Without fulfillment through us in this moment in the Spirit, God could not be fulfilled in himself in eternity. "For my moment is God's eternity." **221**

In contrast to the view that our salvation consists in escaping time, Abhishiktānanda now insists on the importance of the temporal.

> Eternity is coextensive with each instant of time, eternity is a present without succession. And time is the ascent towards this present of contingent being, in its future which tends to being. God has never existed and will never exist without man.[222]

Eternity underlies time; it is "interior" to time, just as rest is "interior" to motion, and just as the Father is "interior" to the Spirit.[223] Time is not distinct from eternity. What is transitory does not make a pair with what abides.[224] Be at once in the eternal *nunc* [now] and in the sequence of time. In the *nunc* of being and in the moment of its manifestation. For the manifestation is *really* nothing other than Being itself. [...] Eternity is entirely present in every moment of time, the absolute in every aspect, every phase of the relative. But the moment that lasts is no longer eternity. Eternity has no duration. It just "is".[225]

In this *sahaja* view, eternity is found within the temporal itself. We recover the world, and discover the reality of time, of becoming, of particularity and multiplicity, at the very heart of Being itself.[226] Abhishiktānanda says that it is true that Hinduism tends dangerously to belittle the value of this world; yet when *jñāna marga* is "correctly understood", it is not so much at a

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[220] *Diary*, p. 370 (2.2.73). See Chatper X for a detailed discussion of *aneka*.

[221] *Diary*, p. 44 (8.6.52).

[222] "Présence de Dieu-Présence à Dieu", *Intériorité*, p. 150. *Diary,* p. 44 (8.6.52): Eternity is not in the time that lasts but in the indivisible moment.

[223] *Diary*, p. 221 (17.8.59). Time is the measure of the creature in the act of leaping (*skandatva*).

[224] *Diary*, p. 274 (16.5.64).

[225] *Diary*, p. 40, (1.6.52).

[226] *Saccidānanda*, p. 129.

different and future "world" that Hinduism aims but at a deeper level of life and consciousness here already. The *jñāni* will be as free living in a desert or putting politics and economics to rights in a city. All sense of I and mine being transcended, he will be a pure instrument of the spirit.[227]

Sometimes, like Heidegger, he speaks of "primordial time." He says that eternity is sensed as the primordial mystery of time, of the awakening to the mystery of the Present![228]

Just as Abhishiktānanda wants to retain a belief in the Beyond or Transcendent, so he wants to retain a belief in an eternity beyond time. The present fleeting moment only gives us a glimpse of eternity.[229] In the fourth state, *turīya*, the *ātman* abides perpetually unmoved, even when it seems to be moving in the various *lokas* in which it is manifested.[230]

Abhishiktānanda wants to hold both time and eternity in paradox. If only the eternal is real, then that leads to acosmism. True acosmism coincides with total 'cosmism', just as total transcendence cannot in the end be distinguished from immanence.[231]

He writes that the awakening "is at once within time and outside time."[232] He regarded the *dīkshā* of Chaduc as being both outside of time but also an event that those who were within time and space could refer to.[233] This seems to indicate his view that the liberated person or *jīvanmukta* is outside of time and space, but is still perceived by the non-liberated as within time and space. The liberated person is free and sovereign overall, in all *lokas* and in every time.[234] The liberated one passes through time without leaving eternity.

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[227] "An Approach to Hindu Spirituality", *Clergy Review* (1969), LIV no. 3, p. 172.

[228] *Diary*, p. 370 (2.2.73). See J.L. Mehta: *Martin Heidegger: The Way and the Vision:* (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1976, first published 1967). "…primordial Time, which constitutes and generates time in its modalities of past, present."

[229] *Letters*, p. 259 (MC 13.12.71).

[230] "The Upanishads: An Introduction", *Further Shore*, pp. 103, 104.

[231] *Letters*, p. 190 (AMS, 9.2.67).

[232] *Diary*, p. 330 (2.7.71).

[233] *Letters*, p. 332 (MC 24.4.73).

[234] "Approach to the Upanishads", *Further Shore*, p. 90, 91. *"Cheminements intérieurs"* Intériorité, p. 66: The *jīvanmukta* is bound in time by his past *karma*.

Abhishiktānanda calls this state of being beyond time and space the discovery of our "a-seity".

> The Deity is that depth of myself which is without duration, without contingency, self-originated [*a se*], etc. Who is bold enough to accept his own aseity?[235]

He relates the discovery of our aseity to the discovery that there is no gulf between oneself and God. Absoluteness cannot be projected, but can spring up only from ourselves. In our own aseity we exist beyond every division of time, matter and space.[236] In his own near death experience, Abhishiktānanda experienced being beyond all *lokas*. But this does not mean being in a different level of being. The Heavenly Jerusalem is *kai nun* [even now]; we only have to open our eyes![237]

In an unpublished article, Abhishiktānanda says that we have no knowledge of what exceeds temporal reality.

> A time beyond the time we experience by sensory perception is purely mythic. By that I do not mean true or false. I have no means of judging that which is outside of my perception.[238]

He says that the Beyond is a different dimension. But it must not be seen as an Absolute that empties the temporal of its value. Rather, the Beyond gives the temporal an absolute value in its relativity itself, and at the same time liberates us from each instant of the temporal. It is in this sense of a denial of any ultimate dualism between Eternity and time that we must understand his statement "there is no further shore." There is no abyss to be transcended. The abyss is in ourself, in our not coinciding with ourself.[239]

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[235] *Diary*, p. 292 (31.1.67).

[236] *Diary*, p. 374 (16.4.73).

[237] Letters, p. 321 (L 3.12.73).

[238] "Foi, sens d'au-dela" (71.06.27 unpublished).

[239] *Diary*, p. 316 (20.8.70).

5. Fullness and Emptiness

Gabriel Marcel says that the problem of full/empty is more fundamental than that of the One/Many.[240] Krüger also says that we must distinguish between mysticisms of substance, of fullness; and mysticisms of nothingness emptiness silence.[241]

The idea of Fullness was also very important to Monchanin. He wrote in a letter, "Le Plérôme et non la Monade!"[242] Monchanin says that Shankara's conception of Being is that of a plenitude (*purnam*) of being. He refers to the Br. Aranyaka Upanishad V,1. "Plenitude here, plenitude there."[243] But according to Monchanin, the Hindu Absolute extinguishes the relative; the Christian Absolute recapitulates it. (*anakefalaiosis).* There is an opposition between the absolute monad (*advaita*) and the Pleroma of the Absolute.[244] Monchanin asked Abhishiktānanda whether it was the void or fullness that was found at the end of his Arunāchala asceticism.[245]

Loy argues that there is no phenomenological difference between Vedānta's idea of *Brahman* of whom we can say nothing, and the Buddhist idea of *śūnyatā*. He refers to Surendranath Dasgupta's statement that it is difficult to distinguish between pure being and pure nonbeing as a category.[246] If *Brahman* is truly one without a second, then *Brahman* cannot even be experienced as One, since numeration implies something else of which to be aware.[247] But Loy's argument of phenomenological equivalence views the experience of Brahman as Pure

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[240] Ysabel de Andia: "Jules Monchanin, La Mystique Apophatique et l'Inde", *Jules Monchanin: Regard croisés d'Occident et d'Orient* (Lyon: Profac-Credic 1997), p. 124.

[241] J.S. Krüger: *Along Edges*, p. 133.

[242]Letter to E. Duperray, Dec. 1955, cited in *Jules Monchanin: Regards croisés d'Occident et d'Orient* (Lyon: Profac-Credic, 1997), p.185

[243]Ysabel de Andia: "Jules Monchanin, La Mystique Apophatique et l'Inde", *Jules Monchanin: Regard croisés d'Occident et d'Orient* (Lyon: Profac-Credic 1997), p. 123. He gives O. Lacombe's translation, *l'Absolu selon le Vedanta*, p. 38.

[244] *Jules Monchanin: Mystique de l'Inde, mystere chretien*, ed. Suzanne Siauve (Paris: Fayard, 1974), p. 291 (31.20.48).

[245] *Lettres au Père Le Saux ed. Françoise Jacquin* (Paris: Cerf, 1995), p. 18.

[246] *Nonduality*, p. 199.

[247] *Nonduality*, p. 213.

Consciousness. It does not address the *sahaja* experience of *Brahman*, where distinctions persist. Nor does it address Abhishiktānanda's idea of trinitarian *advaita*.

Some views of fullness posit a substantial unity underlying all phenomena. This is how the Buddhist scholar Masao Abe understands Vedānta. He contrasts the Buddhist idea of *śūnyatā* with this substantial view. What is interesting from the perspective of my thesis is that in making the contrast, Abe makes the argument that the substantial view should be rejected because it is monistic. He argues that nonduality may not be interpreted as monistic oneness, since the idea of oneness is still dualistically related to duality and plurality. Abe says that non-dualism goes beyond not only the duality between monism and dualism but also beyond monistic oneness itself:

> Monistic oneness, being somewhat over there, does not immediately include two, many, and the whole. Even though it can be all-inclusive it is more or less separated from the particularity and multiplicity of actual entities in the world. This is because monistic oneness is usually substantial. This can be seen in Vedantic monism (Monism in Vedantic tradition) in which various forms of actual entities are understood as *māyā* which is due to *avidyā* or ignorance, or as mere appearance of the absolute One referred to for example as *brahmātma-aikyam*. Again, it can be seen in the philosophy of Spinoza, in which actual entities are grasped as the modes of God as the one Substance. They are merely modifications of the single Substance. On the other hand, non-dualistic oneness which is based on the realization of *śūnyatā* includes all individual things, just as they are, without any modification [248]

We have seen that Abhishiktānanda rejects a monistic view of Vedānta. He also rejects an objectified view of *Brahman*.[249] Abhishiktānanda's idea of fullness therefore appears to meet Abe's criticism of being based on a substantial monistic oneness. Does this mean that Abhishiktānanda is in agreement with the Buddhist idea of nonduality as *śūnyatā*? Is there a difference between Abhishiktānanda's idea of fullness and that of *śūnyatā*

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[248] Masao Abe: "Buddhism is not Monistic, but Non-dualistic" *Scottish Journal of Religious Studies 1*, no. 2 (Fall, 1980): 97-100.

[249] It is in any event not at all clear that the Vedas are necessarily committed to an "ontology of substance". See Wilhelm Halbfass: "The Question of Being in India", *On Being and What There is: Classical Vaiśeṣika and the History of Indian Ontology* (State University of New York, 1992), pp. 21ff.

Abhishiktānanda speaks of both fullness and void. He says that Being is empty of all that is created and that is why it *is.*[250] He also refers to the words that St. John of the Cross uses to introduce *The ascent of Mount Carmel*, "*Todo nada*" [All, nothing].[251] Abhishiktānanda says that the westerner immediately wants to conceptualize these ideas of fullness and emptiness:

> …the westerner at once beings to speculate on what this Self is, about the meaning of the *Void*, the *nothingness,* the *fullness*, to which the Scriptures constantly refer. But then the *fullness* which is conceived is no longer *fullness*; nor does *nothingness* or the *void* have anything to do with what abstract thought seeks to lay hold of.[252]

Gnānānanda's favourite verse was "Where there is nothing, there indeed is everything."[253] But Gnānānanda asked why one would even give the name of 'void' or '*śunya'* to that which has no name.[254] Abhishiktānanda follows this same idea:

> The 'void' is a 'limit-situation' as they say in geometry; you tend towards it, but never reach it; the sustained effort, never halted, but totally directed towards a Beyond which neither word nor feeling can express, the discovery of your own greatest depth, which at the same time is both void and fullness; for as soon as you use words, you *compare* and so set limits.[255]

Abhishiktānanda says that despite this idea of fullness (*sarvam, pūrṇam*), the *advaitic* experience was analyzed to death. Then the Buddha substituted the idea of *śūnya*, the void or vacancy. The Buddha required his disciples to maintain silence, but there has been more analysis of *śūnya* than there has ever been about *pūrṇam.*[256] The idea of emptiness is thus a reaction against the over-conceptualization which had occurred with respect to the idea of fullness. But the idea of emptiness should not itself be conceptualized.

The Vietnamese Buddhist Thich Nhat Hanh agrees with this view that the idea of emptiness was only intended as a means of liberating us from the dogma and overconceptualization that had occurred in Hinduism. He says that the Buddhist notions of

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[250] *Guhāja* p. 27.

[251] *Diary*, p. 70, ft. 32 (30.3.53).

[252] Preface, *Guru*, p. x.

[253] *Guru*, p. 101.

[254] *Sadguru Gnānānanda*, p. 133.

[255] *Letters*, p. 251 (MT 3.9.71).

impermanence, not-self, interbeing (relatedness) and emptiness are means aimed at revealing the errors of knowledge rather than attempts to give a description of new objects of knowledge. They are methods, not information. All that can be said is that the ideas of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) or reality as such (*tathata*) refer to a non-conceptualized reality (not an ontological entity).[257] Thich Nhat Hanh points out that, in an attempt to avoid conceptualization of the notion of emptiness, the *Mahaprajñaparamita Śastra* uses the expression 'non-empty' (*asūnyatā*). The non-empty is thus another name for emptiness and for *tathata*.[258]

Abhishiktānanda emphasizes fullness in many of his writings. For example, he says that we are to see everything–as Jesus did–in the light of eternity, not the *dvandvic muthoi*—heaven/hell, [*svarga/pātāla*]–but of Being, which in its fullness, its *pūrnam,* shines through everything.[259] Abhishiktānanda was fond of quoting th*e Iśa* Upanishad, and its emphasis on fullness.[260]

> Fullness here, Fullness there;
> From Fullness Fullness proceeds.
> Take Fullness from Fullness,
> Fullness ever remains.[261]

This Fullness shows the reality of the world. Even the Incarnation itself does not exhaust the creative capacity of God. It is a fullness that overcomes time, being, and eternity.[262]

Abhishiktānanda says that this Fullness is also experienced personally, in a "trans-psychological way".[263]

> And I am Fullness, *pūrṇam*, precisely in this letting-go of myself everywhere, *sarvatra.*[264]

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[256] "Approach to the Upanishads", *Further Shore*, p. 78.

[257] Thich Nhat Hanh: *Zen Keys* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), pp. 110. 113.

[258] *Ibid.,* p. 115.

[259] *Diary*, p. 311 (26.3.70).

[260] *Letters*, p. 274. Rudolf Otto also emphasizes this passage. Rudolf Otto: *Mysticism East and West* (Macmillan, 1970 first published 1932), p. 40.

[261] *Guru*, p. 43. See *Letters*, p. 245: Abhishiktānanda never tired of singing this.

[262] *Diary*, p. 41 (2.6.52).

[263] *Diary*, p. 123 (5.9.55).

[264] *Diary*, p. 337 (24.12.71).

This "letting go" is where one can no longer recognize one's self separately. One is lost in the space [*ākāśa*] of the heart and the span of the universe. The mystery of divine space [*ākāśa*] penetrates everything and causes everything to be.[265] Space is sometimes used as a metaphor for emptiness.

Loy says that Vedānta prefers to speak of the One and Buddhism prefers to speak of emptiness. But this is because Shankara is trying to describe reality from outside. The Buddha says that we cannot get outside of this phenomenal reality.[266] Similarly, Abe says that monistic oneness is an attempt to conceive and objectify reality from outside:

> Monistic oneness is realized as the *goal* or *end* to be reached from the side of duality. It is somewhat 'over there', not right here. It is conceived and objectified from the outside. Contrary to this, nondualistic oneness is the *ground* or *root-source* realized here and now, from which our life and activities can properly begin. When we overcome monistic oneness we come to a point which is neither one nor two nor many, but which is appropriately referred to as *śūnya* or empty. This emptiness or *śūnyatā* is true oneness in the sense of being completely free from any form of duality.[267]

Loy says that the only transcendence that we have is the emptiness of all phenomena, and that there is no reality other than the phenomenal reality. And yet Loy also says that this emptiness must not be interpreted in a nihilistic sense. He says that the word *śūnyatā* comes from the root *śū*, meaning "to swell". The word has two senses: hollow or empty, but also full, like the womb of a pregnant woman. Both meanings are implied in the Mahāyāna usage: the first denies any fixed self-nature to anything, the second implies that this is also fullness and limitless possibility, for lack of any fixed characteristics allows the infinite diversity of impermanent phenomena.[268]

It is emptiness in the first sense that bothers the Vedāntin. How can we deny the reality of the empirical world without the acceptance of another reality?[269] For the Vedāntin, the lack of

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[265] *Diary*, p. 381 (10.5.73).

[266] *Nonduality*, p. 212.

[267] Abe, *op. cit.*

[268] *Nonduality*, p. 50.

[269] Loy says that this is Shankara's "only telling criticism of Mādhyamika: It is not possible to negate the empirical world without the acceptance of another reality" (*Brahmasūtrabhāṣya II, ii.\31.)*

any substance anywhere seems nihilistic. Loy acknowledges that the idea of emptiness is "unattractive in comparison with an eternal immutable, all-encompassing Absolute."[270] Loy's answer to the objection of nihilism is that although there must be *some*thing, there need not be some*thing*. In other words, there need not be anything that can be experienced as object.[271]

This is similar to Abhishiktānanda's idea that there is a Beyond or Transcendent, but that it must not be objectified or conceptualized. Abhishiktānanda also seems to agree with the second meaning of *śūnyata*, as limitless possibility. He says that *śūnyatā* is the abyss of God. This abyss is in the sense of potentiality. [272]

But the fullness sought by Abhishiktānanda is not just a limitless possibility of combinations, but fullness in some unifying sense. This is related to the issue of teleology, which I will now discuss.

C. Teleology

1. Abhishiktānanda's teleology

Abhishiktānanda believed that the emanation from the One is directed. In evolution, there has been a leap from matter to life and from life to that of love.[273] There is an increasing consciousness where there is more awareness of archetypes and of what was unconscious.[274] Our consciousness, which is now limited, will become wider. There is a drive towards "pure consciousness." This pure Consciousness appears and shines through one's individual consciousness but at the same time infinitely extends beyond it.[275] The final state of consciousness will be the same as that which was achieved by Jesus, that of being a Son of God:

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[270] On James's view of truth, this would argue for a view of Self and not nothingness.

[271] Krüger cites Panikkar: there is nothing to be said about God because ultimately God is nothing. *Along Edges*, p. 130.

[272] *Diary*, p. 52, (2.8.52).

[273] *Diary*, p. 234 (19.7.60).

[274] *Diary*, p. 373 (17.2.73).

[275] *Diary*, p. 316 (20.8.69).

> The universe evolves in the direction of a consciousness that is more and more widely shared and deepened and of the adaptation of the universe to this final state of consciousness, that of the Sons of God.[276]

"The goal of the universe is the consciousness of Being."[277] God himself is seeking consciousness in us; there is a sharing by God in ourselves. This is what is meant by the "image of God." This image of God is not merely a superficial image or reflection or even analogy of the divine Being. God is rather sharing in our own personal life. In our innermost depth we are "a mirror in which God contemplates himself eternally."[278]

How do these ideas compare with Vedānta? Is Abe correct that Vedānta has a substantialized view of ultimate reality? Loy says that *Brahman* is the ultimate ground and "cause" of manifestations.[279] But that is an insufficient basis for a teleology if these manifestations are regarded as "illusion". There can be no real evolution if the manifestations are not real. And Abhishiktānanda's idea of God seeking greater consciousness is definitely contrary to traditional Vedānta. Vedānta denies that *Brahman* is aware of Itself or of anything, since there is nothing else. *Brahman* is One without a Second. Abhishiktānanda recognizes that this idea of Being becoming aware of itself was related to his trinitarianism:

> According to the Christian revelation, this divine mystery, this *tremendum*, is a 'Thou' for me, or rather, I am a 'thou' for him; indeed the divine Reality addresses himself to me, and the ultimate That, *tad*, proves to be an "I". In fact, in uttering the "Thou" with which he addresses his Son, and addresses me in his Son, the Father's "I" awakens Being to awareness of itself.[280]

It is clear that Abhishiktānanda relies on Aurobindo and on Teilhard de Chardin in this idea of a goal oriented evolution, and of God seeking greater consciousness.

> Once this light has flashed in the cosmos, it directs the whole evolution of mankind towards an ever brighter awakening of man to this Light (cp. the powerful intuitions of an Aurobindo and a Teilhard de Chardin[281]

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[276] *Diary*, p. 105 (6.7.55).

[277] *Diary*, p. 286 (22.10.66).

[278] *Saccidānanda,* pp. 121, 165.

[279] *Nonduality*, p. 225.

[280] *Meeting Point*, pp. 112, 113. See also p. 57: The Father awoke to himself.

[281] *Abhishiktānanda*: "The Upanishads and the advaitic Experience", *Clergy Monthly,* Dec., 1974, p. 482.

It is therefore helpful to briefly look at both Aurobindo and Teilhard de Chardin.

2. Aurobindo

We may compare Abhishiktānanda's views to those of Aurobindo. Abhishiktānanda had a *darśana* of Aurobindo on February 21, 1949.[282] This was shortly after his first visit to Ramaṇa. Seeing Aurobindo does not seem to have made too big an impression on him at the time. It was only later that he came to have an appreciation of Aurobindo. He also met disciples of Aurobindo.[283] Abhishiktānanda later began reading the works of Aurobindo. He was aware of some ideas of Aurobindo at the time he met D.K. Mehta.[284]

Like Abhishiktānanda, Aurobindo, also rejects a view of *māyā* as illusion. He refers to his philosophy as "realistic *advaita*."[285] In the supreme experience, the Many cannot be separated from the One. But Aurobindo also believes that there will be an increasing awareness of the Divine. He calls this awareness the 'supra-mental', and says that it would be achieved by the practice of what he called 'integral yoga.'

Abhishiktānanda particularly appreciated Aurobindo's idea of the Supermind, or the 'supramental'.[286] Using this terminology, Abhishiktānanda wrote that this supramental is that 'spark' of which the mediaeval western mystics spoke, and even perhaps a sign of the Spirit (*Pneuma*). It is wisdom, *Umā*. Abhishiktānanda believed that Ramaṇa was at the dawn of the descent of the Supramental.[287]

Another similarity between Abhishiktānanda and Aurobindo is with respect to the importance of a yogic experience. J.L. Mehta was written about Aurobindo's emphasis on an integral yoga. Mehta says that yoga was regarded as an independent means of transcending human finitude through total self-transformation. It ran a parallel course, outside the central

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[282] *Diary*, p. 12 (21.2.49).

[283] *Diary*, Introduction by Panikkar, p. xxiii.

[284] *Diary*, p. 108 (28.7.55).

[285] Frank Thompson: *A New Look at Aurobindo* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1990). He cites Aurobindo's own view of his philosophy as "realistic *advaita*". (SABCL vol. 12 p. 44).

[286] *Diary*, p. 141 (21.1.56).

[287] *Intériorité*, p. 183.

Vedic stream, but often with close interaction between the two. In Aurobindo, these two converge again in an integral yoga, which takes up within itself the modern western idea of an evolutionary quantum leap in humankind.[288]

Aurobindo also influenced Abhishiktānanda in his view of Scripture. J.L. Mehta has written about Aurobindo's view of Scripture. He says that for Aurobindo, the myths and rites recorded in the Vedas are above all symbols (in the Jungian sense). Authority attaches not to Scripture, but to the yogic process. But for Aurobindo, the yogic process itself relies on

> a textual tradition, a *Sruti* an 'order of words', a pre-existent given tradition of language, images, myths and concepts and the key-words that open out its linguistic space within which experience is then ordered and comprehended.[289]

It is in this sense that the word, the *Vac* is primary. The word comes first, but the process culminates in *samadhi*.[290] This reading of Aurobindo is consistent with the use made by Abhishiktānanda of Aurobindo's ideas. It is also consistent with the Yogic Model of the relation between our experience and our concepts.

Monchanin was aware of Aurobindo's ideas and in fact wrote an article about him. It is unclear whether Abhishiktānanda read this article by Monchanin. But Abhishiktānanda did read other articles by Monchanin, so it is quite possible that he also read this one.

In his article, Monchanin says that Aurobindo sought the experience of *nirguṇa* Brahman. Whereas most Hindu mystics attain it only after a long series of visions of *saguna Brahman*, Aurobindo had an immediate realization while in prison. This was followed by other experiences. In Aurobindo's next experience (also in prison), he saw the divine form of Narayana (Krishna); in this vision he saw unity as well as diversity. Narayana appeared both as his own most intimate self and at the same time as the Universal Self situated beyond all particular forms. Aurobindo's third vision was of the equivalence of moving and non-moving aspects of God. The fourth vision was of the supramental planes of consciousness which lead to the supermind.

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[288] J.L. Mehta: *Philosophy and Revelation*, p. 183.

[289] J.L. Mehta: *Philosophy and Revelation*, p. 179

[290] *Ibid*., p. 181.

Monchanin says that Aurobindo partially repudiated Shankara. Aurobindo considered *nirguṇa Brahman* to be only one of the elements of a total mystical experience. What for Shankara was ultimate reality is for Aurobindo penultimate.

Monchanin raises several interesting points about Aurobindo's views. Monchanin asks whether Aurobindo's vision of unity in diversity is the doctrine of *Viśistadvaita* (nonduality differentiated).[291] A similar question could be asked of Abhishiktānanda's views, although Abhishiktānanda does not express any sympathy for Rāmānuja's views.

Monchanin characterizes Aurobindo's thought as energism, panzooism (contrary to appearances, matter is already oriented to life), panpsychism (all life is latent consciousness), pannoetism, pantheism (all consciousness is divine).[292] Monchanin says that Aurobindo's view of consciousness is that one may, without losing one's alterity with respect to others, nor one's finitude, feel oneself interior to all consciousness, and all of them interior to oneself.[293]

Monchanin is critical of the emanation implied by Aurobindo's views. He says that for Aurobindo, God is both Being and Becoming. Becoming is an emanation from pure Being. This occurs by *śakti* and *līlā*. The world is a real transformation of the Absolute. Monchanin calls this *Parināma Vādam,* and distinguishes it from the view of *Vivarta-Vāda*, which sees the world as illusion. Monchanin sees a parallel between Aurobindo and the *Ennéades* of Plotinus: there is an exodus of multiple from the One and return to the One.[294] Monchanin was of the view that Aurobindo's realistic advaita was a result of influence from the *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha* and from tantric sources.[295] Monchanin rejects *tantra* as a degeneration of Vedānta. Monchanin says that for Aurobindo, *tantra* is not seen as a degeneration, but rather as a spiritual renewal, to make the Divine near and tangible.[296]

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[291] *Ibid*. p. 304.

[292] *Ibid* p. 306.

[293] *Ibid* p. 307. It is interesting that Monchanin says this is more like William James's idea of the subliminal subconscious than the ideas of Freud, Adler or Jung.

[294] "La pensée de Śri Aurobindo", *Jules Monchanin: Mystique de l'Inde, mystere chretien*, ed. Suzanne Siauve (Paris: Fayard, 1974), pp. 295, 302, 311.

[295] Monchanin's opinion corresponds to the argument I have made in this thesis of the importance of the *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha* and of *tantra* as influences on Abhishiktānanda's ideas.

[296] *Jules Monchanin: Mystique de l'Inde, mystère chretien*, ed. Suzanne Siauve (Paris: Fayard, 1974), p. 310.

3. Teilhard de Chardin

In his article, Monchanin compares Aurobindo and Teilhard de Chardin. Monchanin complains that Teilhard does not make clear his concept of matter. He says that in both thinkers there is a panpsychism; for Teilhard this is found even in plants; there is also a pre-psychism to non-living matter. Monchanin says that both Aurobindo and Teilhard retain the idea of a personality in the final stage, but that Teilhard does so within a supreme and personalist Person. For Teilhard, the Omega Point, the Pleroma and the mystical body of Christ are all equivalent expressions. Monchanin calls this a "Christocentric pantheism", without fusion nor absorption.[297] Christ is the "Omega Point" to which all creation is heading. The Parousia is when God is "all in all", but only in the Beyond. The Omega point is reached in a twofold process: in the individual's entry into oneself, and in the fulfilment of the evolution of the universe.[298]

Abhishiktānanda was certainly aware of Teilhard's work. He refers to Teilhard's ideas of the "noosphere" and the "Omega Point".[299] Abhishiktānanda asks regarding this idea of Christ as Omega Point: before it is the centre of the world, is it not the centre of the self?[300] Abhishiktānanda repeats Monchanin's view that the Omega Point is reached in a twofold process: the individual's entry into himself, and in the fulfilment of the evolution of the universe, in which the individual also is fulfilled.

> And this Omega point is but one. The universe evolves in the direction of a consciousness that is more and more widely shared and deepened and of the adaptation of the universe to this final state of consciousness, that of the Sons of god. Whoever by entering into himself reaches the Omega point reaches it also for humanity and fulfils the world in himself–this is also the mystery of the Eucharist.[301]

In 1965, Abhishiktānanda writes:

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[297] See Jacques Prévotat: "Henri de Lubac et Jules Monchanin" in *Jules Monchanin: Regard croisés d'Occident et d'Orient* (Lyon: Profac-Credic 1997), p. 105.

[298] *Diary*, p. 105 (6.7.55))

[299] *Guhāja*, p. 69; *Diary*, p. 103 (5.6.55). In March, 1961, Abhishiktānanda participated in a discussion of Teilhard de Chardin's *Phenomenon of Man*.

[300] *Diary*, p. 132 (25.12.55).

[301] *Diary*, p. 105 (6.7.55).

Teilhard's viewpoint–absolutely Pauline–is the only way to save Christianity."[302]

Abhishiktānanda's reading of Teilhard de Chardin is very important in his view that the goal of the universe is the consciousness of being. This view must be contrasted with Abhishiktānanda's earlier view that God is not an object for himself, and so he is not a subject who knows himself.[303]

4. Can there be a teleology without dualism?

Is the very idea of a teleology, or a goal directed evolution, a dualistic idea that is incompatible with *advaita*? From a Buddhist point of view, any view of teleology is sometimes rejected on the grounds that any teleology is incompatible with the doctrine of dependent origination. For example, Krüger denies a teleology in the development of the world, based on his understanding of dependent origination as contingency. In his view, self and world are a nondual, evanescent flux. Things have turned out the way they did because of the myriad ways in which factors interacted. They could have turned out differently.[304] And yet he also says there is order. Evil is the absolute affirmation of dis-order, the denial of all and any structure. There is an "inward light glowing through this fragmented world.[305] He also interprets emptiness as interrelatedness, and says that emptiness cannot be less than a personal universe.[306]

Loy also refers to the Buddhist assumptions of dependent origination, and Nāgārjuna's related denial of any causality whatsoever.[307] But even within Buddhism, Mind-Only or the *Dharmakāyas* is often regarded as that which manifests all things. Does not this idea of a "spiritual totality" imply some order? Loy refers to the Buddhist doctrine that the *Dharmakāya*

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[302] *Diary*, p. 283 (19.10.65).

[303] *Diary*, p. 54 (10.9.52).

[304] J.S. Krüger: *Along Edges*, pp. 185, 186, 289.

[305] *Ibid. pp. 191, 290.*

[306] *Ibid.*, p. 38.

[307] As discussed in an earlier chapter, Loy acknowledges Nāgārjuna's apparent contradiction in first using dependent origination to deny independent existence, and then redefining it to deny causality altogether. *Nonduality,* p. 226.

radiates love and compassion to all, impersonally like the sun, but that many are not receptive to it.[308] Loy also refers to the inherent order in the universe:

> The universe is spiritual because it is ordered in such a way that there is moral as well as physical order, and because those who choose to make an attempt to overcome their egoism find their efforts aided by forces outside their conscious control.[309]

In this passage Loy does not explain how such order fits with the doctrine of dependent origination or with Nāgārjuna's denial of all causation.

It seems to me that Loy's references to order may also require a re-working of his ideas of nondual perception as unconstructed awareness. Loy says that the "bare percept" revealed in *nirvikalpa perception* is very much like William James's idea of "raw unverbalized experience."[310] James also refers to this experience as "pure experience." For James, pure experience is our basic experience, prior to reflection, and prior to division into subject and object. In the immediate, initial moment of knowing and experiencing anything, the object that is seen and "the seeing of it are only two names for one indivisible fact, which, properly named, is the datum, the phenomenon, or the experience."[311] There is no splitting between consciousness and what the consciousness is of. Pure experience is beyond the subject and object distinction. It is "subjective and objective both at once." It is a nondual "primal stuff" that may be either physical or mental depending on its functional context. It is not a substance, but a "plain unqualified actuality, a simple "that" as yet undifferentiated into thing and thought." Our categorization of experience as "subjective (or "mental") and "objective (or "physical") is a secondary, post-facto operation based on a retrospective assessment of the consequences of the experiences. Objective/physical experiences are those experiences that act.[312]

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[308] *Nonduality*, p. 290. Within Buddhism, most Buddhists choose a view of teleology. Wright says that most Buddhists prefer a transcendent realm of buddhas, nirvana, and mind-to-mind transmission. *op. cit.* p. 156.

[309] *Nonduality*, p. 289. Loy refers to Aurobindo.

[310] *Nonduality*, p. 43. Krüger also refers to James's view of "pure experience" in reference to nondualism: *Along Edges* p. 42.

[311] William James: *The Meaning of Truth (Harvard, 1975),* p. 36, cited by Barnard *op. cit.* p. 142

[312] William James: *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, (Harvard, 1976), pp. 4, 7, 13, 15, 36, 37. Cited by Barnard, *op. cit.* pp. 142, 143.

James's views on pure experience should be differentiated from Loy's views on *nirvikalpa* experience in at least two ways. First, James believed in a pluralistic universe, whereas Loy denies pluralism. For James, the world is not constructed by us. Rather, the world appears to us, albeit in the nondual way of pure experience. This is similar to Aurobindo's "realistic *advaita*." As I have argued, this "realistic *advaita*" is similar to Abhishiktānanda's views insofar as he allows a distinction between subject and object, but emphasizes their "unity" or nondifference. In contrast to such realist views, for Loy, the "bare percept" that remains in *nirvikalpa* awareness is not a reality where subject and object have not been differentiated, but only an awareness of their non-existence. For Loy, both subject and object are constructed by our thought, and in that sense, he acknowledges that he is putting forward a kind of idealist solution to the dualism of subject and object.[313]

The second way that James's "pure experience" differs from Loy's idea of *nirvikalpa* experience is that for Loy we construct our world from the wholly contingent *śūnyatā.* It is on this wholly contingent flux that we superimpose names and forms. There is no underlying form or order. But for James there is a direction or order in the world that we intuit. As Barnard says, James did not accept the British empiricist claim (Hume, Locke, Mills) that our consciousness is disjointed and fragmentary. James believed that our consciousness is inherently connected from one moment to the next. This connection in our consciousness is an inherent ontological quality of the universe itself.[314] James also differs from Kant in that he does not believe that our intuition of the world is a mere chaotic manifold; it already contains the germs of meaningful patterns; we elaborate those patterns by our knowledge about them; we do not create them.[315]

This view that our consciousness if not of a mere chaotic manifold is also different from the British empiricist claim (Hume, Locke, Mills) that our consciousness is disjointed and fragmentary. James believed that our consciousness is inherently connected from one moment to

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[313] *Nonduality*, p. 87. Loy says this is not subjective idealism, since he denies any subject.

[314] Barnard, *op. cit.* p. 139.

[315] *Ibid.* p. 116.

the next. This connection in our consciousness is an inherent ontological quality of the universe itself.[316]

To adopt this idea of an inherent order is certainly contrary to some interpretations of Buddhism. It is inconsistent with an interpretation of impermanence and emptiness as pure contingency and flux. But is not such an interpretation of impermanence and emptiness itself an ontological view of the universe? Is it not itself a "view" of the world, to use the language of Nāgārjuna? In Abhishiktānanda's terminology, it would seem to be an overuse of logic within Buddhist thought. Specifically, it appears to me that this view of contingency is based upon a desired accommodation with certain contemporary views of chance and randomness in evolutionary thought.

It is helpful here to look at arguments recently made by Robert Wright regarding randomness in evolution.[317] Wright argues for directionality or progressivism in evolution. He says that natural selection tends toward increasing complexity. He contrasts his views with those of Stephen Jay Gould. According to Gould, even if there is increasing complexity, that does not constitute "progress" because it is fundamentally "random." Gould says that if evolution were replayed on this planet, there is only an "extremely small" chance of getting any species as smart as humans:

> We are, whatever our glories and accomplishments, a momentary cosmic accident that would never arise again if the tree of life could be replanted from seed and regrown under similar conditions.[318]

Gould says that to argue otherwise is "delusion". However, Wright says that Gould gives no philosophical grounds for his belief in randomness.

Wright says that there are really two questions to answer in discussing randomness. The first question is whether a given species was likely to evolve. The second is whether the properties embodied in that species were likely to evolve. Wright argues that even if *homo sapiens* had not evolved, *some* highly intelligent life would have evolved. Complexity was "in

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[316] *Ibid.* p. 139.

[317] Robert Wright: *Non-zero: The Logic of Human Destiny",* (Pantheon, 1999), excerpted as "The Accidental Creationist: Why Stephen Jay Gould is bad for evolution" New Yorker, Dec. 13, 1999, pp. 56-65.

[318] Cited by Wright, I*bid.* p. 59.

the cards." He gives the analogy of the operation of chance in a casino. There is a difference between saying that it took great luck for someone to be a winner, and saying that it took great luck for there to be a winner at all.[319] Evolution is goal oriented. It does not just invent great technologies, but keeps reinventing them. For example, eyes have developed independently dozens of times.[320] Wright says that this does not support theistic creationism. It is probably more a nontheistic view of the world. But as we shall see in the next chapter, Abhishiktānanda also has a nontheistic view of the world.

In my view, Wright's explanation of how teleology and randomness fit together is a good answer to those who would say that it is incompatible with true nonduality. It may be that this demands a re-working of our current ideas of randomness. The Taoist ideas of chance, as incorporated in the *I Ching* also seem to relate to a directness in the process.

In some places, Loy says that the inter-relatedness of the world in terms of Indra's Net means a teleology is not possible.[321] But in another article he gives a different view which might incorporate Wright's revised ideas of randomness:

But in another article, Loy admits that, although a linear causation may not exist, another type of causation could be consistent with Indra's Net:

> …at each interstice is a jewel which may be said to be empty because it simply reflects all the other jewels; but it may also be said to contain all the others. Thus our cosmos is symbolized as an infinitely repeated interrelationship among all its members–each one of which encompasses and expresses all the others. This is very different from our more usual linear and temporal conception of causality; Jung's concept of synchronicity–"an acausal connecting principles–is closer.[322]

If we make these changes in our view of randomness, then there is an interpretation of Buddhism that is consistent with Abhishiktānanda's view of an inter-relatedness that nevertheless has an inherent order. I have compared Abhishiktānanda's idea of inter-relatedness with the Buddhist idea of Indra's Net. There is nothing that is not inter-related, so this is

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319 *Ibid*. p. 64.

320 *Ibid.* p. 62.

321 David Loy: "The Deconstruction of Buddhism", *Derrida and Negative Theology*, ed. Harold Coward (State University of New York, 1992), p. 237.

322 David Loy: "The Difference between saṁsāra and nirvāṇa", *Philosophy East and West* (Oct. 1983), vol. 33 no. 4, p. 363.

consistent with the Buddhist view of impermanence. But just because everything inter-related, does not mean that such relations are totally random.

IX. The Mystical Union of God and Humanity

Another sense of nonduality is the mystical unity between God and ourselves. This issue concerns more theological than philosophical questions. It is also the area of interest for most of those who have written about Abhishiktānanda. The concern of these writers has often been to show how Abhishiktānanda does or does not fit within a given "mystical" tradition, either Christian or Hindu. They seek to answer the question whether he believes that there is a final merging of the individual into God. But his position with regard to mystical unity is very much dependent on the assumptions that he makes for the other dualities we have examined. Even what he means by 'God' is dependent on these assumptions. He rejects a theistic view of God, or any view of God as "Wholly Other."

To understand Abhishiktānanda's view of mystical unity we must take into account his view of the relation of the One to the Many, of transcendence-in-immanence, and his interpretation of two levels of reality. It is no use comparing his ideas to a given theology until we understand his position that all theologies, like all conceptualizations, are limiting and therefore relative. In his view, not only all theologies, but also all religions must be surpassed. Abhishiktānanda's use of the Scriptures (both Biblical and Vedic) also reflects his underlying assumptions.

A. The Experience of "I Am"

For Abhishiktānanda, the fundamental religious experience is the *advaitic* experience, which he compares to Jesus' 'I Am' experience:

> In Johannine terms Jesus discovered that the I AM of Yahweh belonged to himself; or rather, putting it the other way round, it was in the brilliant light of his own I AM that he discovered the true meaning, total and unimaginable, of the name of Yahweh. To call God 'Abba' is an equivalent in Semitic terms of *advaita*, the fundamental experience.[1]

How did Abhishiktānanda come to interpret the Gospel of John in this way? Before coming to India, Abhishiktānanda had read Herbert's account of Ramaṇa. Herbert explicitly

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[1] *Letters*, p. 282 (TL 16.1.73). See also *"Sannyasa"* Further Shore *p.* p. 56.

compares the experience achieved by Ramaṇa method of Self-Enquiry with the words of Jesus:" My Father and I are one."[2]

Ramaṇa himself also compares the name of Yahweh to the *advaitic* experience. He says that the Hebrew 'Jehovah' is equivalent to 'I am', and that it expresses God correctly.[3] Lakshman (one of Ramaṇa's early disciples) refers to Ramaṇa's statements about I AM THAT I AM.[4] Lakshman also uses Jesus' statement "My father and I are One" to describe Ramaṇa's own enlightenment. Ramaṇa became a "perfect sage" when he realized that he and Arunāchala, whom he called his Father, were one.[5]

An entire article on 'I Am' has since appeared in the journal for Ramaṇa's ashram, *The Mountain Path.*[6] It collects all the 'I am' statements of Jesus. The article specifically refers to Abhishiktānanda, and cites some of his letters.

We find similar emphases on the 'I am' experience in other writers with whom Abhishiktānanda was familiar. Rudolf Otto comments on Eckhart's use of the verse" I am that I am", and compares this to Shankara.[7] D.T. Suzuki says that all our religious or spiritual experiences start from the name of God given to Moses, "I am that I am." He says this is the same as Christ's saying, "I am."[8]

Abhishiktānanda says that India makes us discover the 'I Am' at the heart of the Gospel.[9] He sees these 'I am' statements by Jesus as the key to understanding the mystery of Christ,

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[2] Herbert: *Quelques grands penseurs de l'Inde (Trois Lotus)*, p. 25. Abhishiktānanda frequently refers to this verse from the Gospel of John. For example, see *Diary*, p. 42 (5.6.52).

[3] *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, pp. 102, 106, 110, 140, 155, 323, 401, 424, 487, and 556. Ramaṇa quotes the verses "I am that I am", and "Be still and know that I am God." These references show Ramaṇa's familiarity with Christian Scripture.

[4] Sarma K. Lakshman: "La Récherche", *Études sur Ramana Maharshi,* ed. Jean Herbert, p. 120.

[5] Sarma K. Lakshman, "Le Sage d'Arunāchala", *Études sur Ramana Maharshi*, pp. 44, 43.

[6] David Godman: "I AM–the First Name of God", *The Mountain Path* 1992 29/3-4, pp. 126-142. For another recent article on this topic see Seiichi Yagi, "I in the Words of Jesus", *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, ed. John Hick and Paul F. Knitter (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1987), pp. 117ff.

[7] Rudolf Otto: *Mysticism East and West* (Macmillan, 1970, frist published 1932), p. 27.

[8] D.T. Suzuki: *Mysticism, Christian and Buddhism* (Harper, 1971), p. 126.

[9] *Letters*, p. 262 (MT, 29.1.72). He refers here to John 8. In John 8:58 Jesus says: "Before Abraham was, I Am." *Diary*, p. 372. (17.2.73) See also "Theologoumenon upāsana: méditation sur la Trinité" (1970), *Intériorité*, p. 226.

which is the same as the mystery which one is.[10] He interprets the Gospel of John as referring to the eternal mystery of Christ and his oneness with the Father in the Spirit. 'Abba' expresses this mystery of oneness or "non-distance" with the Father. 'Father' is the distinction between God and creature; but in the consciousness of Jesus, this distinction "exploded":

> Jesus experienced such a closeness to God […] that he exploded the biblical idea of 'Father' and 'Son of God' to the extent of calling God 'Abba', i.e., the name which in Aramaic only the one who is 'born from' him can say to anyone. But the term 'Son' is only imagery, and I fear the theologians have treated this image too much as an absolute, to an extent that becomes simply mythical.[11]

Panikkar has commented on this saying of Jesus, "I and my Father are one." Panikkar refers to it as a *mahavakya* of Jesus. He comments:

> Jesus does not dilute the issue. On the contrary, he does not minimize the answer, he maximizes it by daring a 'blasphemous' exegesis of a Hebrew psalm (LXXXII, 6): "You are Gods.[12]

Abhishiktānanda sees the idea of Father/Son not so much in terms of derivation of the Son from the Father as in terms of the relationship of *ekatvam* (oneness).[13] *Ekatvam* is what India has named this experience of nonduality.[14]

> And in this duality [*dvaita*] of Father and Son beyond the *advaita* of the Spirit, neither the Son nor the Father address each other as an other. "The Father and I are one" [*Ego et pater unum sumus*, John 10:30] [15]

This 'I Am' experience is not unique to Jesus. We can have the same 'I am' experience:

> God is not known, Jesus is not known, nothing is known, outside this terribly 'solid' AHAM that I am. From that alone all true teaching gets its value.[16]

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[10] *Letters*, p. 305 (7.7.73).

[11] *Letters*, p. 282 (TL 16.1.73); He says that Jesus refused to give absolute value to the symbolic formulations of his day. *Diary*, p. 369 (2.2.73). In "Dans Le Centre Le Plus Profond", *Guhāntara* (unpublished) Abhishiktānanda says that the names 'Father', 'Son' and 'Spirit are only images to aid us to reach the real.

[12] Raimon Panikkar: "The Mysticism of Jesus the Christ", *Mysticism in Shaivism and Christianity*, ed. Bettina Bäumer (Delhi: Abhishiktānanda Society, 1997), p. 148. Panikkar says there are three *mahāvākyani* of Jesus: (1) "Abba, Father!" (2) "I and the Father are One" and (3) "I should go" [in order to give the Spirit]. He discusses all three in detail in this article.

[13] *Letters*, p. 297 (MC, 28.4.73).

[14] Letter dated 25.8.72, cited in *Eyes of Light*, p. 178.

[15] *Diary*, p. 39 (1.6.52).

[16] *Letters*, p. 316 (MC, 20/21.10.73).

Abhishiktānanda says that the term 'Son of God' was not meant to make Jesus unique. In calling himself 'Son of God', Jesus did not want to separate himself from others. He wanted to separate himself from the conception that his Jewish contemporaries gave themselves before God. Against the scriptures of his day, he used ideas like Servant and Son of Man, and made them practically explode.[17]

To show that the experience of Jesus is also available to us, Abhishiktānanda refers to texts like the high-priestly prayer of Jesus (John 17), where Jesus asks the Father to bestow on his disciples that same glory which had been his even before the foundation of the world. Abhishiktānanda also interprets St. Paul in this way. In the Epistle to the Romans St. Paul tells us that we are fellow-heirs of Christ and heirs of God:

> For all who are guided by the Spirit of God are children of God. The Spirit you have received is not a spirit of serfdom leading you back into fear but a Spirit that makes us children, enabling us to cry 'Abba! Father'! The same Spirit joins with our spirit in testifying that we are God's children; and if children, then heirs: God's heirs and Christ's fellow-heirs, since we suffer with him so that we may be glorified [also] with him.[18]

Panikkar's interpretation of this passage is that, if Christ calls God his Father, we too can re-enact this experience by the gift of the Spirit.[19] He comments on this and the other "I am" texts:

> From a monotheistic perspective the radical separation between the human and the divine seemed threatened by those blasphemous confessions. This was Christ's challenge. The first Christian thinkers understood it well. "God becomes Man in order that Man become God." [Clement of Alexandria][20]

Another text that Abhishiktānanda refers to in support of this same idea 1 Cor. 6:17 where Paul says "Anyone who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with him."

Abhishiktānanda compares the Biblical statements of the 'I Am' experience to the revelation of the *aham* [Self] in the Upanishads.

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[17] "Sat-purusha", *Intériorité*, (Jan/73), pp. 303, 304.

[18] Rom. 8: 14-16, as cited by Panikkar: "The Mysticism of Jesus the Christ", *Mysticism in Shaivism and Christianity*, ed. Bettina Bäumer (Abhishiktānanda Society, 1997), p. 135. Panikkar also refers to Gal. 4: 6,7.

[19] *Ibid.,* p. 138.

[20] *Ibid*., p. 151.

> To know God in himself, we must be reborn as Sons of God, according to the paradox of the Gospel which unfortunately theology has often emptied of its striking force. The one who is reborn as the Son of God, is that different than the one who is *Brahman* without beginning nor end?[21]

Abhishiktānanda says that the awakening to Self is the moment when all that can be said or known is 'I AM', the 'Ah!' of the Kena Upanishad. His friend Murray Rogers relates that this comparison between the Bible and the Upanishads made every notional idea and every –ology related to the history or thought begin to disintegrate for Abhishiktānanda.[22]

Abhishiktānanda emphasizes the centrality of the 'I Am' experience, but he gives different descriptions of what this experience is like. In many places, he describes it as a Pure Consciousness experience. "I am that I am" is the same as the experience of *ekam eva advitīyam* [One without a second]. This *kevala* experience is how Abhishiktānanda understands the Biblical verse "I am the Lord and there is no other". He says that we can no longer project anyone or anything opposite to oneself. "Perfect transcendence lets nothing else subsist."[23]

Abhishiktānanda says that the word '*Saccidānanda*' also gives some idea of this *kevala* experience. Considered from the aspect of Being (*Sat*), this is Being in itself, *aseity*. Considered from the aspect of consciousness [*cit*] it is non-distinction between object and subject. From the angle of bliss [*ānanda*] it is non-distinction of enjoyer and enjoyed of lover and the beloved, of the *śānti* in the *kevala*.[24] This is God in His Aloneness, *kevala*. Elsewhere, he uses Meister Eckhart's expression of seeing "with the very eye with which God sees himself."[25] He says that when we become sons of God, we pass from non-being to Being, from time to eternity.[26]

But in other places, Abhishiktānanda says that the 'I Am' experience is not only of God in His aloneness but also in relation to phenomena. This is why the Brihadāranyaka Upanishad

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21 "Theologoumenon Upasana: méditation sur la Trinité", *Intériorité*, (1970) p. 218 (my translation).

22 Comments of Murray Rogers, Dec., 1972, cited in *Letters*, p. 280.

23 "The Experience of God in the Religions of the Far East" (1973), *Eyes of Light*, p. 23

24 *Diary*, p. 54 (10.9.52).

25 *Diary*, p. 377 (19.4.73). It is interesting that he uses this expression in reference to understanding the Trinity. Even in 1973 he understood the *advaitic* experience in Trinitarian terms.

26 *Meeting Point*, p. 91.

1,4,1 refers to the commencement of the universe in the form of the *Purusha*, who said, 'I Am.' That was the beginning of the world separating out from the Self.

When the 'I Am' experience is viewed in relation to phenomena, this is the *sahaja* experience–seeing self or *Brahman* in the other:

> The advaitin experience is neither *jñāna*, nor *bhakti*, nor *karma*. It is neither the Upanishadic formulations nor those of Shankara. It is the sense that I am not other to anyone or to anything whatever, that *I am*. […] It is the sense of the other as myself. The discovery of myself in the other.[27]

There is an "oscillation" between these two views of the experience: *kevala* and *sahaja*.

> [We have] constantly oscillated and will forever oscillate between these two poles of understanding the Absolute: the Other and the My of myself, the Self of the self. There is no *advaitin* who does not at one time or another does not [sic] address God as YOU, and there is no sociological religion no matter how dualist where one or other of the adepts do not write as Al Hallaj: Remove this you which is between You and me.[28]

Sometimes Abhishiktānanda refers to the 'I Am' experience in existential terms. the 'I Am' experience is to be interpreted as an experience of being: "I know that *ego eimi* [I am]. Do not ask me anything else."[29]

The experience is not a vision.[30] Nor is it an abstraction from our experience of God. Rather I experience God as an 'I' of which I am aware in the very depth of my own I.[31]

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[27] *Diary*, p. 342 (10.4.72).

[28] Odette Baumer-Despeigne: "The Spiritual Way of Henri Le Saux Swami Abhishiktānanda", *Bulletin of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue*, 1993, vol. 48, Oct., p. 21.

[29] *Diary*, p. 359 (3.8.72).

[30] *Letters*, p. 212 (MT, 14.4.69).

[31] Abhishiktānanda: "The Upanishads and the Advaitic experience" *Clergy Monthly*, Dec./74, p. 484.

B. Abhishiktānanda's criticism of theism

1. Theism as Projection

Abhishiktānanda maintains a belief in Transcendence, but not a dualistic view of Transcendence. What this means in theological terms is that he rejects any idea of God as "Wholly Other". Such a Wholly Other God is only a projection of our own selfhood.

Abhishiktānanda says that in the West, we begin with the distinction between God and humans. Especially in Mediterranean thought, the patriarchs and prophets projected their awe and fear of the sacred outwards, as if it were "another" facing them, a God confronting them from a throne above.[32] Humans do not dare to accept themselves as absolute. So they report the absolute in God. This is trying to make God into an object. But God cannot be an object, since the 'object' essentially depends on the subject who 'puts it before' himself or herself (*ob-jicit*).[33]

He says that when we project God as 'other', this is for most people really nothing but the impossibility of being *oneself*. It is a fearing to be, the vertigo of being.[34]

> …what I had projected into a sphere that was divine, eternal, etc.,… which I had adored, loved, etc.–is my own mystery.[35]

According to Abhishiktānanda, we may choose to explain the mystery of creation by either projecting a God who is Creator, or by the experience of the 'I Am':

> The existence of creatures–that which is other than God–is a mystery which no philosophy can pierce. One can explain the world by a God that is superhuman, who possesses in an eminent fashion all the energies and perfections which we can detect or deduce in oneself and nature. This God is the image and the measure of man. Or at the other extreme, called by a powerful intuition to the center of oneself, to the center of being, swallowed by the abyss, gripped by one's

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[32] "An Approach to Hindu Spirituality", (1969) *Clergy Review* LIV No. 3, p. 164. See also "Théologoumenon Upasana (méditation) sur la Trinité", *Intériorité*, p. 230 and "Sat-Purusha", *Intériorité*, p. 310. This projected God is the idea of God as Babylonian monarch. *Letters*, p. 185 (L, 8.10.66). He had been reading J.A.T. Robinson's *Honest to God.*

[33] "Yoga and Christian Prayer", *Clergy Monthly* (1971) Vol. 31, no. 11, p. 477.

[34] *Diary*, p. 167 (21.11.56).

[35] *Diary*, p. 331 (22.7.71).

> Self, burn there by the devouring fire of the One whose name is "I AM" (Deut. 4:24)[36]

He says that in India, the experience of the Self is so full of the mystery of God that it is not possible to "project" God.[37]

> The Hindu is right, God is within, in what is most deep, most inward, most "self" of oneself. It is not a matter of going out of oneself, going outside in order to meet God…[38]

Instead of a dualistic projection outwards, we must seek God within ourselves.

> Whoever has not encountered himself within himself has never encountered God; and whoever has not encountered God in himself has never encountered himself. No one encounters himself apart from God, and no one encounters god apart form himself.[39]

'On high' really means 'within'.[40] God is within us in the deepest sense, even deeper than our own existence. "God is within me before I am there myself, before I am."[41]

Abhishiktānanda says that so long as one has a strong sense of one's own ego (*ahamkāra*) God is necessarily 'another'.[42] In other words, the sense of otherness of God is felt only so long as we have not made the total surrender of ourselves.[43]

> The deepest Self appears as an other, as a guru, as a *deva*, as *Īśvara*, so long as the flash of recognition [*abhijñāna*] has not yet shone forth.[44]

When we go within, then any God other than ourself totally disappears. The Supreme *Deva* [God] totally disappears in the depth of the *guhā*:

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[36] "Présence de Dieu-Présence à Dieu", *Intériorité*, p. 148.

[37] Letter 2.9.72, cited by Dupuis, Introduction to *Intériorité*, p. 20.

[38] *Diary*, p. 72 (5.6.53).

[39] *Guhāntara*, cited bv Odette Baumer-Despeigne in Introduction to *Secret,* p. x.

[40] *Letters*, p. 69 (L, 29.4.53).

[41] *Diary*, p. 223 (8.11.59) But Contrast: "The first word of the prophetic message is not that God exists, or that God told me, but that *I am.* In the I of the son and the reciprocal Tu of the Son which the Father awakens to himself. mutual regard. I cannot say Tu without reference to an I." "In principio erat verbum", *Intériorité*, (Nov/71) p. 305 (my translation).

[42] "Sannyāsa", *Further Shore* p. 13.

[43] *Diary*, p. 153 (28.7.56).

[44] *Diary*, p. 341 (2.4.72).

> And from the depth of the *guhā* it is myself, my own image, that is revealed to me, my form [*eikon*[that has replaced the shadows (Heb. 10:1).[45]

Abhishiktānanda says that when the Presence is reached, we do not even need God.

> And when that is found, then you are free and need nothing more–not even God, as Gnānānanda would say! For God no longer has to be found and possessed. He is himself my "I am"![46]

Abhishiktānanda's rejection of a dualistic projection does not mean that all otherness or alterity with God is rejected. But such 'otherness' has a different sense than when it is used in reference to the created world of distinctions and concepts. This otherness of God can never deny that there is also no second to God, *ekam eva advitīyam.*[47] Abhishiktānanda is therefore paradoxically asserting both a kind of otherness as well as an absolute oneness with God. "I am from an Other than whom there is no other."[48]

If there is still some alterity with God, does that mean that Abhishiktānanda still experienced God as a person? Loy says that as long as God is considered to be a separate person from myself, the experience of God is still somewhat illusory. When God is not considered as a person, then to experience God is "to forget oneself to the extent that one becomes aware of a consciousness pervading everywhere and everything."[49] But Loy does say that experience of God as a person is preferable to a nihilist view of *śūnyata* or to a *Brahman* so abstract and otherworldly that it has no relation to our lives.[50]

Abhishiktānanda seems to reject a personal view of God. He says that the Father is not necessarily *Someone,* to whom he would say Thou, of whom he would say He, or to whom he would address an adoration or prayer.[51] God is the original source, *Brahman*, the *Urgrund*.[52]

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[45] *Diary*, p. 380 (30.4.73). Mehta says the interiorizing process of yoga was devised as a way of eliminating the distance of otherness. J.L. Mehta: "Sri Aurobindo", *Philosophy and Religion: Essays in Interpretation* (Indian Council of Philosophical Research, 1990), p. 183.

[46] *Letters*, p. 222 (OB 9.11.69).

[47] "Cheminements intérieurs, *Intériorité*, p. 45, ft. 13. "For God is not a thou like the other 'Thou's' that we know, the Thou of which we have a concept." *Diary*, p. 92, (6.5.54).

[48] *Diary*, p. 179 (26.11.56).

[49] *Nonduality*, p. 291.

[50] *Ibid*. Cf. Krüger: *Along Edges*, p. 38. God is not less than a person.

[51] *Diary*, p. 358 (3.8.72).

Abhishiktānanda also rejects the emotion of felt love towards God, since such emotion is dualistic:

> Not surrender to another–to the Other–no, not even love for him. Love that is felt is not total love, it reeks of attachment to self, to the lower self.[53]

That quotation is from 1952. Abhishiktānanda still held this view disparaging the personal in 1972. He says that the *Bhagavad Gītā* is far from the Upanishads. It has the same vector, the same thrust as the Upanishads, but it has projected the mystery:

> [The *Bhagavad Gītā*] no longer has the piercing glance of the Brihad. Upanishad. The mystery has to be projected and the unformulable formulated–because people are no longer able to *know* it in its unformulability.[54]

Abhishiktānanda compares St. John of the Cross's idea of the "beyond" (*Todo nada*, All, nothing) to the *kevala*. St. John of the Cross tried to make it clear that God is not at all what people *think* he is. He is not what people adore, as the Kena Upanishad says.[55]

> The God that I project, the God of superimposition [*adhyāsa*], is surely dead. This disappearance of the God that is *pradishta* ('pointed out'; to "project" it) is considered by John of the Cross as a night, because this "state of experience" is related to "another" experience.[56]

Abhishiktānanda says that the death of this projected God is a fact. But from his ashes the true God will arise.[57]

> I had lost God, and in my search for him, it is I myself that I have recovered, but myself, what a myself![58]

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[52] *Diary*, p. 299 22.5.68). He says there is only one Person in the Trinity, and that is Christ, the Purusha.

[53] *Diary*, p. 49 (17.7.52). This is similar to Vedānta's view of *bhakti* as a lower form of experience. But see Kalliath, who tries to show that Abhishiktānanda's experience of God is personal. Antony Kalliath: *The Word in the Cave: The Experiential Journey of Swami Abhishiktānanda to the Point of Hindu-Christian Meeting* (New Delhi: Intercultural Publications).

[54] *Letters*, p. 277 (OB, 4.10.72).

[55] *Diary*, p. 70 (30.3.53). *Diary*, p. 268 (5.4.64), ft. 6. He refers to the Kena Upanishad 1,4. "That which cannot be thought by the mind, but that by which they say the mind is thought–this is *Brahman*, understand well, and not what is worshipped here as such." (Translation from Panikkar's *The Vedic Experience*).

[56] *Diary*, p. 380 (30.4.73).

[57] *Letters*, p. 185 (L, 8.10.66). See also *Diary*, p. 304 (11.1.69): "It is truly terrifying to find oneself without any *deva*, either in this world or in any other."

[58] *Diary*. p. 379 (25.4.73).

Some mystics, like Eckhart, speak of a Godhead behind God. Abhishiktānanda rejects this view, too. He says that the Godhead [*theotes*] is not conceivable without *nāmarūpa*. There is no thought about the mystery that is not already *nāmarūpa*, formulation.[59] In fact, Abhishiktānanda says that the mystery of God is expressed equally well by a "polytheistic" myth as by a "monotheistic" myth.[60] They are both manifestations of being.

2. Transcendental Atheism

In his reaction against any idea of a projected God, Abhishiktānanda is willing to join forces with atheism:

> Nor is it unchristian to see in the present wave of atheism a drastic and providential means of purification for all believers which may free them from their innate tendency to idolize God and to cut him out according to their own patterns.[61]

He says that there is a "transcendental atheism" which searches for the mystery beyond *theos* [God].[62] Surprisingly, he also says that there is not much difference externally between the *jñāni* and an atheist. Both people reject the superimposition of an extraneous God on things. These superimposed names and forms are given to God on the model of the names and forms of things human and other. The difference between the *jñāni* and an atheist is that the *jñāni* sees the radiance of all things, the Presence, "without seeking to explain it by new names and forms." (To give new names and forms would once more be a superimposition).[63] All names and forms are idols:

> So long as anyone has not penetrated to that inner source from which diversity itself originates, he is merely cherishing the external idols which he has created on his own petty scale[64]

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[59] *Diary*, p. 370 (2.2.73).

[60] *Diary*, p. 295 (29.9.67).

[61] Abhishiktānanda: "Communication in the Spirit" *Religion and Society* Vol. XVII, NO. 3, 1970, p. 38.

[62] *Diary*, p. 323 (24.11.70). He says, Today's atheism is a necessity for the religious evolution of the human being." (*Diary*, p. 296 (22.10.67). This idea of transcendental atheism is explored by Panikkar in his *Silence of God: The Answer of the Buddha* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1990).

[63] *Diary*, p. 288 (12.11.66). See also *Letters*, p. 274 (L.1.7.72): "But between the total experience, to which we are summoned by the Upanishads, and secularism, there is but a hair's breadth of difference."

[64] *Guhāntara*, cited by Odette Baumer-Despeigne in Introduction to *Secret,* p. x.

Another difference between the *jñāni* and the atheist is that the *jñāni* does not desire anything, neither God nor anything else. The atheist (*nāstika*) desires everything except God.[65]

The *jñāni* does not discover anything new, but just sees reality in all its glory.[66] The *jñāni* has recovered the state of communion of the child with the world before the child discovers his or her ego.

And yet despite these similarities with atheism, Abhishiktānanda still speaks of the importance of the 'beyond.' He says that the political work of the Christian differs from the atheist because it consciously carries within it a dimension of the "beyond", and because of the awareness of being both one with this beyond and other from it.

> The ontological tension towards my fellow human is a sign and sacrament of the absolute (We, like God, are One and Other).[67]

In contrast to this, atheism, which has its own myths, refuses all transcendence and believes that humans only discover and attain themselves in their *temporal manifestations.*[68] For Abhishiktānanda, the difference between the realized person and the atheist therefore has something to do with holding the One and the Many in tension, and with a transcendence (in some sense) of time.

3. Union and Communion

De Smedt challenges Abhishiktānanda's impersonal view of God. He asks, if being face to face with God is a projection, how can we call God 'Father'? Jesus still made demands of God and asked for Blessings. De Smedt asks whether we are to interpret these prayers of Jesus as just using figures of speech.[69]

A similar question is raised by Dupuis. Dupuis asks whether the consciousness of Jesus can really be identified with the *advaitic* experience. He says that the experience of Jesus was

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[65] *Guru*, p. 86.

[66] *Diary*, p. 288 (12.11.66).

[67] Abhishiktānanda: "Foi, sens d'au-delà" (unpublished, 27.06.71). My translation.

[68] "Archétypes religieux, expérience du soi et théologie chrétienne", Intériorité, pp. 181, 195.

[69] Marc de Smedt (ed.): *Question de Christ et Vedanta: L'expérience d'Henry Le Saux en Inde* (Albin Michel, 1991), p. 94.

non-dual, but that Jesus still distinguished between Father and Son. The "I" of Jesus established at the same time his unity with the Father and his distinction with the "Thou" of the Father. The "I" of Jesus is not that of the Father in which Jesus loses himself, but that of the Son, living in human consciousness his unity and his distinction with the Father. Dupuis says that the experience 'I am' may be non-duality, but the experience of 'Abba' is a personal communion with God?[70] This is similar to the objection raised by de Smedt about the idea of projection. Can we really speak out against projections if we also refer to God as Abba?

Abhishiktānanda gives several different answers to this question whether the use of the word 'Abba' means that one is still distinguishing between Father and Son. His different answers depend on whether or not the 'I Am' experience is characterized as Pure Consciousness.

In some places, Abhishiktānanda justifies the use of the term 'Abba' by the fact that we have not yet given up our sense of otherness. He refers to Ramaṇa's explanation:

> One day someone asked Śri Ramaṇa Maharshi why Christ taught his disciples to give God the name of Father. He answered, 'Why should one not give God a name, so long as God remains for him "another"?' Once a man has realized the truth, what room is left for anything like an *I* or a *Thou* or a *He*? Who is left even to whisper: 'O my God, Thou alone art; I am nothing!'[71]

This answer assumes that the calling of God 'Father' is a result of our continuing ignorance or *avidyā*, believing ourselves to be other. In other words, it is a result of projection.

In other places, Abhishiktānanda speaks of the term 'Father' as being a *symbol* (in the meaning of depth psychology). This symbol is at the level of *nāmarūpa*. 'God' is only another name of being, of being "when it is looked in the face"[72] And so is 'Father'. Being is the *Grund* that Jesus calls Abba.[73] The Father in himself is ineffable; the Father in himself is a limit that

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[70] J. Dupuis, Introduction to *Intériorité*, pp. 31-32.

[71] *Guru*, pp. 64, 65. Ramananda Swarnaragiri quotes Ramaṇa: "As long as you respond to a name why do you object to adoring God with or without form? Adore God, with or without form, until you know who you are." (my translation.). In Jean Herbert, ed., É*tudes sur Ramana Maharshi*, p. 214. Abhishiktānanda makes a similar statement in *Diary*, p. 358 (3.8.72).

[72] *Diary*, p. 95 (2.7.54).

[73] *Diary*, p. 311 (26.3.70).

can never be thought directly.[74] Abhishiktānanda expands on this Kantian idea of the unknowability of the Father-in Himself. He says that even thinking about the Father implies a distinction between manifested and unmanifested. In the *advaitic* experience there is neither Father nor Son nor Spirit, and nothing that can be substituted for them, not even nothingness.

> The *advaitic* experience is the experience of the Father. But there is no absolute experience of the Father in himself. The Father is not known except by the Son and in the Son […] The Father in himself is a limit which can never be thought directly.[75]

Although Abhishiktānanda emphasizes our projection of God as an other, there are passages where he himself emphasizes that there is both communion and *kevala* in the *advaitic* experience. In this 'I am' experience, there is both an experience of unity and of difference, just as there is a unity and difference in the Trinity. Although Jesus experiences that he and the Father are One, he also experiences that the Father is greater than himself. Abhishiktānanda writes to Chaduc:

> But that 'Greater One', whom you find lying behind myself and yourself, is not-other-than you or me. "The Father is greater than I." "I and the Father are one." The vision of Jesus recovers all its power when his Spirit–entirely in the depths–has revealed the depth of the *Aham*.[76]

In these passages, Abhishiktānanda acknowledges that the otherness of God is not just a result of projection. Jesus' statement "the Father and I are one" [*Ego et Pater unum sumus*], should be regarded at the same time as in *dvaita* and in *advaita.*[77] Jesus addresses God as the 'Other' but at the same Jesus acts like God. Therefore Jesus calling God 'Abba' is not like our calling God the Transcendent.[78] It means more that God is the Presence of God among us. The

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[74] "Theologoumenon Upasana: méditation sur la Trinité", *Intériorité*, (1970), p. 233. Sometimes Abhishiktānanda uses 'Mother" instead of 'Father'. *Diary*, p. 358 10.7.72).

[75] "Theologoumenon Upasana: méditation sur la Trinité", *Intériorité*, p. *232*.

[76] *Letters*, p. 319 (MC, 23.11.73).

[77] *Diary*, p. 32 (3.4.52). This position would answer the questions raised by De Smedt and Dupuis.

[78] Abhishiktānanda points to these statements of Jesus: 'I come from God' 'I proceed from God', 'I am going to God'. Claims judgment is given to him (Jn. 5:22), power to forgive sins (Mk 2:5, Jn. 20:21) lord over death (Jn. 5:24; attributes to himself the divine name revealed to Moses "Unless you believe that I am" (Jn. 8:24. Kalliath p. 164.

term "Son" puts a nuance, a subtle distinction between him and the All-Powerful.[79] And if Jesus was not afraid of referring to God as 'Father', then neither should we:

> …if Jesus said 'Thou' to God and called him his Father, I have no right to look down on myself or anyone else who likewise says 'Thou' to God. [80]

In the previous chapter of this thesis, we have seen how Abhishiktānanda initially emphasizes *Brahman* in its *kevala*, but that he later moves to a trinitarian view of communion. He rejects a dualism between *saguṇa* and *nirguṇa Brahman*. There is both unity and diversity, *kevala* and communion. At this stage of his thought, Abhishiktānanda is no longer adamant that any view of a personal God is mere projection:

> The *theos* of prayer or adoration is not a simple projection of my thought; it is the real image of the unborn [*aja*] which appears to me on the screen of the world.[81]

Nevertheless, his use of the phrase "the screen of the world" recalls Ramaṇa's use of that analogy, where ultimately only *nirguṇa Brahman* is real, and the world is a projection of *Brahman*. Instead of *Brahman* being our projection, we are the projection of *Brahman*.

C. Scripture

Abhishiktānanda views all scripture, Hindu as well as Christian, as being a record of someone's experience. This is a view more common to neo-Hinduism than to classical Hinduism. In neo-Hinduism it probably begins with Debendranath Tagore (1817-1905). Debendranath Tagore was the father of the poet Rabindranath Tagore whom Abhishiktānanda had cited in the work written for his mother. Debendranath Tagore emphasized intuition, using the word *ātmapratyaya* to translate the idea. Tagore saw Scriptures as being the record of experiences of the seers; he said that we need to evaluate the truth of these scriptural accounts. He rejected the Upanishadic teachings of the identity of *ātman* and *Brahman*. Similar views of Scripture being the record of experience (or *anubhava*) were expressed by Vivekānanda (1863-1902) and later by Radhakrishnan (1888-1975).

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[79] "Jésus le Sauveur", *Intériorité*, (1970), p. 282.

[80] *Letters*, p. 294 (MC, 12.4.73).

[81] *Diary*, p. 324 (30.11.70).

For Abhishiktānanda, the Upanishads are a record of the *advaitic* experience, the reports transmitted by those sages and prophets of history whose inward gaze has pierced as far as those depths.[82] The Upanishads aim to lead us to such an experience. They are not a connected series of logically deduced propositions, but rather a series of intuitions that aim at shattering our accepted categories of perception and judgment.[83]

Clooney has a similar view about the Upanishads. He says that they often characterize *Brahman* as possessed of various qualities, but then they instruct us to deny these qualities. The tension between these two kinds of statements creates an unstable and creative environment for reading, in which the reader is repeatedly repositioned in relation to the texts used in meditation and study. By compelling the reader to move back and forth, the reader is prepared to actually appropriate the truth. The mastery of the text by its reader occurs simultaneously with the accomplishment, the event, of its truth.[84]

Following the ideas of the French Indologist Renou, Abhishiktānanda says that the Upanishads are about "correspondences" between self and being, between *ātman* and *aham*. These correspondences are not perceptible at the mental level (the realm of *manas*) but they can be discerned by a particularly acute *buddhi* (intelligence or intuition).[85]

Abhishiktānanda believes that the two earliest Upanishads, the Bṛihadāranyaka and the Chāndogya most faithfully express the Upanishadic thought in its radical purity.[86] He also believes that the Upanishads need to be freed from their ritual-magic substratum.[87]

Abhishiktānanda sees the Hebrew Bible and Christian Scriptures in the same way: as a record of experience, and as correlation. He says that both the Vedas and the Gospels are a "correlation" that sets the spark of of *anubhava* (experience). Teaching ideas is always "outside" this experience; teaching leads only to *nāmarūpa*.

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[82] "The Upanishads, an Introduction" *Further Shore*, p.66.

[83] *Meeting Point*, p. 47.

[84] Francis X. Clooney, S.J.: *Theology after Vedanta: An Experiment in Comparative Theology* (State University of New York, 1993), pp.81, 82, 121.

[85] "The Upanishads, an Introduction", *Further Shore*, p. 83.

[86] "The Upanishads, an Introduction", *Further Shore*, p.77.

> Beyond the *nāmarūpa* there is the 'correspndence' (=*upanishad*), which in a lightning flash reveals Being, the true, the beautiful. Thatis what counts in the words of the Vedas, as in those of the Gospels.[88]

If Abhishiktānanda is correct that the experience is in some sense primary, then truth is not dependent on speculation or on revelation, but can be experienced empirically. Abhishiktānanda specifically says that no special revelation is needed; there is no separation between Biblical revelation and general cosmic revelation.[89] The words of Scripture are in themselves never more than signs pointing to an experience. That which is not created can never be reached by anything created, as the Upanishad continually asserts (Muṇḍaka Up., 1.2.12).[90]

Does Hinduism agree that the Upanishads are only a record of experience? Mehta says that traditional Hinduism emphasizes the revelation of the word.[91] And as has been discussed earlier in this thesis, the emphasis on experience or *anubhava* is a development in neo-Hinduism. For example, Aurobindo takes a symbolic and psychological interpretation of the Vedas.[92] Monchanin is critical of this reading of the Vedas by Aurobindo. He compares this to Renou's interpretation.[93] For Aurobindo, the secret of the Vedas is of a psychological order; the battle is within us, between Truth and light; sacrifice is symbol of interior sacrifice of Self. Monchanin says that Aurobindo read the Rg Veda in the light of Upanishads and the Gītā, instead of reading the Upanishads in the light of the Rg Veda. He says that all of Aurobindo's metaphysics is found in the Iśa Upanishad verse 12.[94]

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[87] *Letters*, p. 271 (MC, 13.6.72).

[88] *Letters*, p. 269 (MC, 28.5.72).

[89] "Révélation cosmique et révélation dans le Christ" (1970), *Intériorité*, p. 253.

[90] "The Upanishads, an Introduction", *Further Shore*, p. 69.

[91] *Ibid*. p. 171. See also Krüger: *Along Edges*, p. 50. He contrasts the Buddhist emphasis on experience with the Upanishadic emphasis on revelation and speculation.

[92] See J.L. Mehta: "Sri Aurobindo: Life, Language and Yoga", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, ed. William J. Jackson (New York: Brill, 1992), p. 162. But he points out at p. 167 that Renou criticized Aurobindo's systematization of the Vedas on a mystical base.

[93] It was Renou who influenced Abhishiktānanda's interpretation of the Upanishads as a "correlation".

[94] "La pensée de Śri Aurobindo", *Jules Monchanin: Mystique de l'Inde, mystere chretien*, ed. Suzanne Siauve (Paris: Fayard, 1974), pp. 309, 312.

D. Specific Christian Theological Considerations

Abhishiktānanda's idea of Scripture as a record of experience is an idea that is of interest to both Hindus and Christians. His emphasis on the need to return to the Upanishads, and his criticism of the logicism of later Vedānta is also of interest to Hindus. Chidānanda has used Abhishiktānanda's ideas as expressed in *Sannyāsa*.

However, Abhishiktānanda was aware that the audience for his books was primarily Christian. His books were not intended for Hindus. Rather, they were meant to sensitize Christians and to prepare them for dialogue.[95] Accordingly, we will look at some ways that Christian theological ideas are affected by Abhishiktānanda's ideas. This chapter can describe only some of Abhishiktānanda's theological views. It will be evident from even this brief sampling that his views were not in accordance with the traditional Christian creeds.

Abhishiktānanda interprets all theological ideas in terms of the *advaitic* experience. But since he gives different accounts of this experience, he also gives different explanations of the theological doctrines.

Abhishiktānanda's reinterpretation of Christian doctrine is related to his view that people ought to stay within the tradition that they were brought up in.

> As long as we remain at the level of signs, the best signs for us are normally those among which we first awoke as men, and as men devoted to God, even if later on those signs have to be purified and freed from their limitations and particularity.[96]

And yet he acknowledges that he himself was only able to understand the Christian Scriptures after reading the Hindu ones.[97] He says that it is in Christ Jesus that the mystery was discovered in himself, and that it is in his image, his symbol that he knows God. But since his awakening, he says that the symbol has been marvelously amplified. And he recognizes the same mystery in Shiva, Purusha, Krishna, Rāma and others.[98] And Abhishiktānanda says that Hinduism's symbolism is richer and more universal than that of Christianity. This is because it

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[95] *Letters*, p. 180 (RP, 18.5.66).

[96] "Sannyāsa", *Further Shore*, p. 47. Jung held a similar view–that we must develop ourselves in relation to our own Western thought, and not try to adopt Eastern thought. But Jung also reinterpreted Western thought.

[97] *Letters*, p. 262 (MT, 29.1.72).

[98] *Diary*, p. 332 (24.7.71). Jesus is the theophany for Christians.

is free from historical particularity and also free from *logos* and *eidos*.[99] Although he therefore expresses a preference for some symbols over others, Abhishiktānanda also says that he continues to have a "visceral" attachment to Christian doctrines and concepts.[100]

But Abhishiktānanda emphasizes that all doctrines are relative and on the level of *nāmarūpa*. All formulations are *upāsanas*, approaches in prayer, in contemplation, in humility.[101] He refuses all theology, both that which the "*nāmarūpin*" Christians try to impose on him, and equally that which the no less *nāmarūpin* Vedāntins want to impose. He wants to recover the wisdom of the Buddha's silence.[102] He says that all dogmas are all "detours" which prepare for the awakening.[103] And as soon as you theologize, you fall.[104] He says that the discovery of Christ's 'I AM' is the ruin of any Christian theology, for all notions are burnt within the fire of experience.[105]

Abhishiktānanda was concerned that if the *advaitic* experience burns up all theology, a teacher must be very careful with what is said to disciples:

> If I burn up a Christian's *nāmarūpa*, I must at all costs lead him to the very end; otherwise I leave him hanging without hope.[106]

1. Trinity

For Abhishiktānanda, the Trinity is the central dogma of Christianity. But this doctrine, like other doctrines, is in the phenomenal realm of *nāmarūpa*. He says that neither the term

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[99] *Diary*, p. 363 (25.12.72). See also *Diary*, p. 372 (17.2.73): "The *mythos* of the *Purusha* is wider than that of Christos." *Diary*, p. 245 (17.2.62): "The religious experience of India is unquestionably superior to Jewish and Hellenic religious experience."

[100] *Diary*, p. 319 (8.9.70).

[101] *Diary*, p. 380 (30.4.73). The editor explains that '*upāsana'* means 'to be seated close to, giving respect and devotion', as in the word 'Upanishad'.

[102] *Diary*, p. 359 (3.8.72).

[103] *Diary*, p. 329 (2.7.71).

[104] *Diary*, p. 370 (2.2.73).

[105] *Letters*, 311 (MR, 2.9.73).

[106] *Diary*, p. 351 (28.5.72).

'Trinity' nor the theology concerning it has been revealed in the New Testament. It is a reflection of faith within a Greek framework.[107]

Abhishiktānanda marvels that the doctrine of the Trinity should be so "useless" in the normal and ordinary life of Christians.[108] The Trinity is often presented as an abstract concept, whereas it is the most concrete and most immediate reality that exists.[109] For the common run of Christians and theologian, the Trinity has become a crude, second-rate *Trimūrti*.[110] The doctrine of the Trinity therefore needs to be 'reshaped":

> About the Trinity, it is a whole reshaping of the *theologoumenon* [theological statement, dogma] itself which is needed (…) I more and more think of our dogmas as the *upāsana* [meditation] or *vidyā* of the Upanishads. The term(s) *Three Persons*, *Nature*, have to be given up as misleading and, at least in translation, as wrong.[111]

Abhishiktānanda says that we must take an existential approach to the Trinity, based on our own experience. The triune God is inaccessible to the faith of the believer, except by his or her own experience. It is not a matter of "believing" that Jesus is God or that there are three persons in God who "saves" us. Those are formulations that are literally incomprehensible in India.[112]

He says that the mystery of the Trinity has to be rediscovered behind the Council of Nicaea, which has brought theology into a "blind alley".[113] Any discussion of Trinity must proceed from Jesus' own experience.[114] The Trinity is one way of expressing the indescribable mystery of our depths:

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[107] "Theologoumenon Upasana: méditation sur la Trinité" (1970), *Intériorité*, p. 229. At p. 218, Abhishiktānanda says that we do not hear of 'three' before Tertullian. Page 229: neither the term Trinity nor the conciliar formulas are revealed.

[108] *Diary*, p. 277 (31.1.65).

[109] "The Priest for Whom India Waits, for whom the World Waits" (1964), *Eyes of Light*, p. 117. Also "Notes de théologie trinitaire", *Intérioreté* p. 243: the Trinity has become one of the most abstract thoughts, without influence on spiritual life. It is often experienced as the "three outside of me."

[110] *Diary*, p. 102 (5.6.55).

[111] *Letters*, p. 246 (SG, 5.4.71).

[112] *Diary*, p. 300 (6.7.68).

[113] *Diary*, p. 260 (30.8.63).

[114] "Notes de théologie trinitaire", *Intériorité*, (1970) p. 244.

> I can not comprehend anything of the mystery of the Son proceeding from the Father and therefore ineffably one with him, as long as I have not had at least the confused sense in me of the mystery which is already mine, of being from an other, *ab altero*, and yet at the same time, at the most intimate of my being, non-dual with that other.[115]

Just as Abhishiktānanda expresses differing descriptions of the 'I Am' experience, he also has differing descriptions of this trinitarian experience. In some places, the experience is seen in terms of Pure Consciousness. For example, he says,

> If I only have an external relationship with the Trinity, the Trinity has no meaning for me. It only has meaning for me when the *antariksha*, the spatial distance that is between It and myself, is broken through, and I can contemplate It from within, with the very eye with which God sees himself.[116]

Abhishiktānanda refers to this Pure and Absolute Consciousness:

> Being (*Sat*) is a shoreless ocean of Light, a Brightness of which all things are simply manifestations in time and space, *nāmarūpa*, names and forms. But *That*, *Tat*, is in itself without any duality, *advaita*. Of it nothing can be said, no definition be given, no proper sign formulated. It is an absoluteness of Peace and Bliss, *śānti*, *ānanda*. No one remains to say anything of any other, to say HE. No possible exchange even of I and THOU; only an infinite I, AHAM, present to himself alone…[117]

In this Pure Consciousness, there is no place for adoration, for no one remains to adore.

But generally, Abhishiktānanda sees the doctrine of the Trinity as showing that the fundamental nature of Being is communion*, koinonia*. At the very Source of Being, the One without a second, there is *koinōnia*, *co-esse*, 'being-with', 'being together', community of being, mutual love and communication of life, an eternal call to each other, and an eternal rest in each other. Without this trinitarian vision of communion and *koinonia*, we are left with the One of Plotinus, the Divine Monad who cannot know or love by himself.[118]

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[115] "Theologoumenon Upasana: méditation sur la Trinité", *Intériorité*, (1970) p. 230.

[116] *Diary*, p. 377 (19.4.73).

[117] "An Approach to Hindu Spirituality", *Clergy Review* (1969) LIV No. 3, p. 165.

[118] "Présence de Dieu-Présence à Dieu", I*ntériorité*, p. 142. Abhishiktānanda's criticism of Plotinus could also be extended to the *Vedāntic* vision of *Brahman* as the One without a Second, or to Abhishiktānanda's own description of *Brahman* as an infinite AHAM.

This idea of the Trinity as *koinonia* also has ethical implications for us. Abhishiktānanda says:

> Rightly understood, the experience of the Trinity is the experience of my relation with each of my fellow-men and with every creature.[119]

The Trinity therefore refers to becoming oneself in reciprocal relationship [*paraspara*].[120] This reciprocal relationship with others is love. It awakens us to the *sahaja* state of the *jīvanmukta*.

> When this idea of communion is put into practice it should awaken each one to the awareness of being from God, in communion with every thinking being, indeed with every being. Then, as St. Benedict says at the end of chapter 7, what was duty becomes natural *sahaja*, the natural state, as said Ramana.[121]

Odette Baumer-Despeigne says that Abhishiktānanda's trinitarian view of Being is closer to Greek Orthodox than to Roman Catholic thought. He sees the Father as the source of the Trinity.[122] The Father is the hidden mystery of the Deity, manifesting in Son and Spirit. Everything, including the Son, issues from the Father. The Son is seen as symbolic of all creation, or manifested reality.[123] The Spirit is the 'non-duality' of the Father and the Son. In other places, he says the Spirit is the unity, the *ekatvam* in the mystery of the *advaita-ekatvam*, the non-duality and unity of being.[124] Abhishiktānanda refers to the *filioque* dispute between the two Christian traditions; he says that the Catholic doctrine that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son is another "projection" of our spatio-temporal needs into the divine sphere. It tries to save the personality and the ego of our phenomenal consciousness. This formulation has turned against the profound insight from which it was born, and has falsified the relation between the mission of Son and Spirit. It has wrongly amplified the mission of the Son with respect to that of Spirit, and placed the accent on the juridical and conceptual form instead of the interior

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119 "Approach to the Upanishads", *Further Shore*, p. 84. Diary p. 333 (20.9.71): The Trinity is becoming oneself in reciprocal relationship. *Letters*, p. 229 (M.4.3.70): The Gospel, freed from its "tawdry coverings" is valuable in showing this love.

120 "In principio erat verbum", *Intériorité*, p. 310.

121 *Letters*, p. 267 (OB, 20.11.70).

122 Interview with Odette Baumer-Despeigne by Sr. Pascaline Coff, O.S.B., p. 20.

123 "Theologoumenon upāsana: méditation sur la Trinité", *Intériorité*, (1970) p.228.

124 *Meeting Point,* p. 101.

spiritual mystery that goes beyond form. It has also falsified the mission of the Spirit by identifying it with the Church.[125]

Abhishiktānanda says that Buber's distinction between I and Thou is correct, but that this 'Thou' does not divide us nor separate us, because there is only one Spirit proceeding. Gaudapāda, who advocated *advaita*, is also correct.[126]

Panikkar makes a similar comment about "I and Thou".

> The I-Thou relationship is not dualistic like the relation of two substances. I and Thou are not two 'things'. They are constitutively related. There is no I without a Thou–and vice-versa. Nor is it a monistic relationship.[127]

According to Panikkar, it is not even correct to speak of difference between I and Thou, between Father and Son:

> They could be different only over against a common ground which allows for the difference from each other. But this is only the case if we substantialize both, make of both two substances which obviously would then be different. [...] Neither Father nor Son are substances.[128]

Panikkar says that the experience of Sonship is not pantheism; pantheism is a conceptual interpretation of the experience. Instead, he sees it in terms of a diminution of the ego: "I and the Father are one in the measure that my ego disappears." There is a "transparency which is all the more pure the more I am rid of my little self."[129]

We have seen how Abhishiktānanda uses trinitarian language to describe the emanation of the Many from the One. The "procession" of the Son from the Father reveals otherness. The procession of the Spirit reveals unity. Abhishiktānanda's use of trinitarian imagery does not necessarily mean that he is relying on a two level theory of reality, at least as commonly

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[125] "Theologoumenon upāsana: méditation sur la Trinité", *Intériorité*, (1970), p. 224.

[126] *Diary*, p. 102 (5.5.55). The reference is to Martin Buber's *I and Thou* (New York, Scribner, 1970).

[127] Raimon Panikkar: "Mysticism of Jesus the Christ", *Mysticism in Shaivism and Christianity*, ed. Bettina Bäumer (Abhishiktānanda Society, 1997), p. 104. At p. 108 he says, P. 108 "the Thou shares consciousness with the I, but both are distinct and cannot be reduced to one. This is *advaita*, non-dualistic." He says that I and Thou are interdependent as in the Trinity.

[128] *Ibid*., p. 153. He shows how some of the early Church Fathers, like Gregory of Nyssa also denied substance.

[129] *Ibid*. p. 155. This is how Panikkar interprets "pure in heart." When our heart I pure, we identify with the Spirit, an egoless force (p. 167). "Blessed are the poor in spirit" (Matt. 5:3) is not a statement about economics, but an invitation to discover that the entire universe is me. We are a microcosm reflecting the entire macrocosm (p. 159).

understood. In many places, Abhishiktānanda writes as if the idea of the trinity can be viewed in a totally immanent way. In some passages, Abhishiktānanda writes as if the Trinity means nothing other than the relation between the One and the Many. In one of the strongest of these passages, Abhishiktānanda says that the Trinity is a "projection": "The Trinity is the projection in God of the reciprocity of being (*parasparam*)."[130]

For Abhishiktānanda, the reciprocity of Being is that between the One and the Many. We experience it in the 'I Am' (*aham asmi*) as identity and otherness. This reciprocity is already visible at the level of minerals in relation to human society. But in the 'I am' experience it is at the level of consciousness at the source of Being itself. We project this experience when we place it in God. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are forms of Being: form being *a Patre*, in being *in Filio*, into being, *in Spiritum Sanctum.*[131]

Sometimes Abhishiktānanda specifically equates God and Being:

> God is only another name of being, being when seen face to face. But God can't see Himself. Mystery of *śūnyatā*. And in this *śūnyatā*, never have beings have been as real and never has their distinction been as real, and never has their harmony been as real. This emptiness is the Real itself.[132]

At times, Abhishiktānanda seems to identify the Son with the temporal world. He cites 1 Cor. 15:28[133] and says:

> This text almost seems to say that the mission of the Son is simply coextensive with the world and with time, and that, when the world is finally recapitulated and taken up in him, he will again be hidden eternally in the bosom of God.[134]

In other places, Abhishiktānanda writes that the Trinity refers to the arising of all phenomena from Being. That is why there is no separate Trinity to adore:

> I don't know how to adore the Trinity, for I am within it.[…] I am at the very centre in the centre [*madhya*] who is the Son.[135]

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[130] "In principio erat verbum", *Intériorité*, p. 310.

[131] *Diary*, p. 167 (21.11.56).

[132] *Guhāja*, p. 21.

[133] "When all things are thus subject to him, then the Son himself will also be made subordinate to God who made all things subject to him, and thus God will be all in all." (NEB) He also refers to Col. 3:3 " And now your life lies hidden with Christ in God." He makes this same point in "L'epiphanie de Dieu", *intériorité*, p. 125.

[134] "Theologoumenon upāsana: méditation sur la Trinité", *Intériorité*, (1970), p. 227 (my translation).

The Trinity is the revelation of our own Being. In his last *Diary* entry, he writes, "The trinitarian mystery is the revelation of my own depth."[136]

For Abhishiktānanda, the experience of the Trinity is that of finding ourselves as individuals in the manifested world, and then relating this experience to the Source of our being, which is the unmanifested reality. But for this conception of our relation with others and with other beings, there does not seem to be any necessity for the Christian terminology of the Trinity. The Trinity is just one culturally conditioned expression for this experience.

2. Christology

Abhishiktānanda's beliefs regarding Jesus change from regarding Jesus as the unique incarnation of God to seeing Jesus as a human like us who is a paradigm for our lives. Jesus is the one who can show us the *advaitic* experience. Abhishiktānanda himself acknowledged that the further he went in his *advaita*, the less he was able to present Christ in a way that could be still considered as Christian. He said that he could start with Christ only if the approach is notional, by ideas. Instead, the experience must be existential, not notional.[137]

> The Christ I might present will be simply the I AM of my (every) deep heart, who can show himself in the dancing Shiva or the amorous Krishna![138]

Jesus had the 'I am' experience, and realized himself as a Son of God. The Baptism of Jesus was the fundamental experience for Jesus. Abhishiktānanda compares this to the experience of Ramaṇa. Ramaṇa had the experience of being possessed by the Spirit of God.[139] As already discussed, this experience is not unique to Jesus. Jesus had the revelation in fullness of that which is of each of us.[140]

Initially, Abhishiktānanda did regard the experience of Jesus as being unique. For our own *advaitic* experience, we would have to "participate" in Jesus:

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[135] *Diary*, p. 43 (8.6.52).

[136] *Diary*, p. 388 (12.9.73).

[137] *Letters*, p. 310 (MR, 2.9.73).

[138] *Letters*, p. 311 (MR, 4.10.73).

[139] *Diary*, p. 285 (21.20.66).

[140] *Diary*, p. 286 (21.10.66).

> Jesus, as the perfect son of Man, *sat-puruṣa*, was the first to receive this [full revelation of glory], and did so in the name of all men. No one can ever reach it, unless he participates in the unique experience of Jesus.[141]

In other writings, Abhishiktānanda rejects this idea of participation in the experience of Jesus. He says that participation implies otherness, diminution. participation that would not be identification.[142]

Later, Abhishiktānanda writes that Jesus' experience is like that of any other person. Jesus is the *sat-purusha*, the authentic man, the real son of God.[143] The experience of Jesus is not unique. Abhishiktānanda asks, "How could the Unlimited be limited to a single manifestation?"[144] He says that everything that the Christ said or though about himself, is true of everyone.[145] "Jesus is not made greater by refusing to others that which gives him his own glory."[146] And Jesus is no greater if people make him into a 'God'.[147]

> When we speak of the divinity of Christ and of his divine Sonship, we are victims of the Greek outlook which dominated the four Councils and culminated in Thomas Aquinas.[148]

Abhishiktānanda says that Christian theology has made of Jesus and of God a *deva*, and that this is a "wall which hinders the direct view of the Mystery of *brahman-ātma*."[149] To speak of Jesus as Man and God are still dualities. The truth is beyond these *dvandvas*.[150] He refers to the Zen Buddhist expression, "If you meet the Buddha, kill him." He compares this statement to John 16:7: "It is good for you that I depart. If I leave you will receive the Spirit."[151]

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[141] *Saccidānanda,* p. 84.

[142] *Diary*, p. 53 (10.9.52).

[143] "Sat-purusha", *Intériorité*, (Jan/73) p. 295.

[144] *Diary*, p. 284 (19.1066); *Diary*, p. 62 (8.3.53): He asks, how could Christ exhaust God?

[145] *Letters*, p. 287 (MC 4.2.73).

[146] *Diary*, p. 364 (27.12.72).

[147] *Diary*, p. 344 (24.4.72).

[148] *Letters*, p. 282 (TL, 16.1.73).

[149] *Diary,* p. 329, (2.7.71). Also "Dialogue Postponed", p. 218: you have minimised your Christ by insisting on the unique claims of Jesus.

[150] *Diary*, p. 342 (2.4.72).

[151] "Appel à l'intériorité", *Intériorité*, p. 173, ft/. 42.

> Jesus is a person who has totally discovered, realized his mystery. He is that in the first place. All the rest is a superfluous addition. All the rest is gnosis.[152]

He says that the mystery of Jesus Christ is not different from the mystery of humanity. Each person is as unique for the Father as was Jesus.[153] Jesus had the revelation in fullness (plenitude) which belongs to everyone.[154]

> All that the Christ said or thought about himself, is true of every man. It is the theologians who—to escape being burnt, the devouring fire—have projected (rejected) into a divine *loka* [sphere] the true mystery of the Self.[155]

The projection of the experience into the divine sphere occurs even in the Biblical record of Jesus' experience. Abhishiktānanda says that this projection was done in order to "safeguard" God's transcendence:

> To save itself from this depth experience which annihilates everything of which the human ego knows of itself, Biblical thought (New Testament) has rejected into the divine sphere–at the risk of seeing surge a still more violent *aporia*–this identity with *Brahman* which it had discovered--for without the sense of this identity, how could the identity of Jesus as human and as God be even thought? On the other hand, Biblical thought has also projected into this same divine sphere the I-THOU of his relation with God––equally to save it–leaving to theologians the job of saving the mystery by their abstractions while lay people try to cope with these approximations which falsify the sense of the revelation itself.[156]

The mystery of Jesus is the same mystery as that of any person. We are all the only Sons of God.

> Jesus is unique as is every consciousness. All are incomparable. Whoever awakens to the mystery of Brahman under the name of the Father is the only Son.[157]

For Abhishiktānanda, Jesus is a "marvelous epiphany of the mystery of Man", of *Purusha*. But so was the Buddha, Ramaṇa and many others. He says that the Hindu does not

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[152] *Diary*, p. 376 (19.4.73).

[153] *Diary*, p. 334 (12.12.71).

[154] *Diary*, p. 286 (21.10.66).

[155] *Letters*, p. 287 (MC, 4.2.73).

[156] "Theologoumenon upasana: méditation sur la Trinité", (1970), *Intériorité*, pp. 220, 230 (my translation).

[157] *"Sat-Purusha (1973), Intériorité*, pp. 299.

understand why the Christian is content to stop with epiphanies of God, and refuses to go to their source.[158] We are all like Jesus:

> Jésu l'Advaita, l'Unique fils du Père,
> auquel nous ne sommes pas des seconds
> mais en qui nous sommes tous l'Unique Fils,
> et en l'Esprit duquel nous sommes tous Un avec le Père.
>
> Jesus the Advaita, the Only Son of the Father,
> to whom we are not second,
> but in whom we are all the only Son,
> and in whose spirit we are One with the Father.[159]

Therefore, for Abhishiktānanda, all Christology has disintegrated:

> Christ is the very mystery 'that I AM", and in this experience and existential knowledge all christo-logy has disintegrated. It is taking to the end of the revelation that we are 'sons of God'.[160]

This state of being a Son of God is described in terms of the *advaitic* awakening, and in terms of a trinitarian balance between *advaita* and *an-eka.* [161]

If we all can become Sons of God, then it is our experience that is important, and not the historical events related in the Bible. Abhishiktānanda says that in an Indian interpretation of salvation-history, Christ shares the transitoriness of the world of manifestation, of *māyā*. Those who discover the Self have no need of Christ.[162] The historicity of Christianity is not the basis of its value.[163]

> All my life, all my thought was centred for so many long years on that point in space and time where Jesus appeared. And now it must be "disconnected" from space-time and centred on the eternal, the non-manifest [*avyakta*].[164]

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[158] "L'épiphanie de Dieu" (1953), *Intériorité*, p. 110.

[159] *La* montée, p. 58; Diary, p. 38 (6.4.52).

[160] *Letters*, p. 311 (MR, 2.9.73). See also *Letters*, p. 310 (MR, 2.9.73): "Yet I am interested in no christo-logy at all. I have so little interest in a Word of God which will awaken man within history (…) The 'Word of God' comes from/to my own 'present'; it is that very awakening which is my self-awareness."

[161] *Guhāja*, p. 23

[162] *Letters*, p. 217 (RP 10.7.69).

[163] *Diary*, p. 360 (25.10.72).

[164] *Diary*, p. 137 (6.1.56).

Abhishiktānanda is interested not in the historical events in Jesus' life, but in the trans-historical Christ or ontological Christ, who is present at the source of personal awareness.[165] This has nothing to do with historical events.

> All this salvation related to an *event* in the history of the world is incapable of saying anything whatever to the immense majority of people, whether they are pre-Christians or post-Christians (the dechristianized people of Europe).[166]
>
> and
>
> Christ, the living God, does not mean for me once again Jesus of Nazareth. Christ is the mystery of my origin from God [*a Deo*].[167]

He says that the awakened one who lives in Self lives in eternity. For the awakened one, Christ is not born, does not die, is not resurrected. That occurred in time, but that time is not more.[168] It is not its historicity that gives Christianity its value, but the timeless values expressed in it.[169] What are these values? He says that only the attitude of Jesus during his life has universal validity: the Sermon on the Mount, the commissioning of the disciples, his freedom.[170]

Abhishiktānanda refers to the words of Silesius from the 17th century: "Of what meaning for me the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus as long as it is not really born in me, dies in me, resurrected in me?"[171] It is not the historical acts in space and time that are important:

> Christ, even more than a being involved in Space-Time, is that absolutely final level of consciousness, that final point beyond which nothing remains but the passage to the Father.[172]

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[165] Odette Baumer-Despeigne: "The Spiritual Way of Henri Le Saux Swami Abhishiktānanda", *Bulletin of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue*, 1993, vol. 48, Oct., p. 20.

[166] *Diary*, p. 265 (23.1.64).

[167] *Diary*, p. 115 (14.8.55).

[168] "Cheminements Intérieurs", *Intériorité*, p. 52.

[169] *Diary*, p. 360 (25.10.72).

[170] "Sat-Purusha", *Intériorité*, p. 300. And *Diary*, p. 299 (9.7.68): the teaching of Christ is dispossession-insecurity. See also "Sannyasa" *Further Shore*, p. 54 regarding the radical ethics of Jesus, which he compares to the life of a *sannyāsī*.

[171] "Expérience spirituelle (*anubhava*) et dogmes", *Intériorité*, p. 212 (Gyansu 28.12.70 to 2.4.71). He repeats this in *Letters*, p. 304 (7.7.73).

[172] *Diary*, p. 132 (25.12.55). And *Diary*, p. 287 (26.10.66): Christ is less real in his temporal history than in the essential mystery of my being.

Jesus does not contribute any theory to the subject of God or of man. He simply shows an example and a way.[173] Jesus is useful as a *guru* to lead us to the experience. But once we have the experience, he is no longer necessary:

> Jesus may be useful in awakening the soul–as is the guru–but is never essential and, like the guru, he himself must in the end lose all his personal characteristics. No one really needs him. (…) Whoever, in his personal experience (…) has discovered the Self, has no need of faith in Christ, of prayer, of the communion of the Church.[174]

The Holy Spirit is the integrating force which leads us from the historical Christ to the ontological Christ, who is present at the source of personal awareness, the last stage before becoming lost in the Father.[175]

He says that Christ is an archetype, the cosmic and social expression of that which each of us carries within–a duality of centers, but an essential *advaita*.[176] In the Christ archetype we see our reality, which is a "triple tension":

1. between *ātman* and *Brahman*
2. between the *purusha* that I am conscious of being as a phenomenon and the *purusha* on the other side of the heart, which I *am* in reality
3. between the individual that I am and the *samasta* [the totality].[177]

Abhishiktānanda's reinterpretation of Christianity is certainly contrary to the traditional orthodox view of Jesus. If Jesus is unique only in the sense that each of us is unique then 'uniqueness' means only that Jesus was an individual within the manifested reality of this world. As one such individual, he showed us how to recognize our divine Sonship and oneness with God. But Jesus is not the only person to act as such a paradigm. Nor is our becoming a Son of God in any way dependent on what Jesus did in history. Others can awaken to their true Self without any reference to the life of Jesus.

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173 "The Theology of Presence as a Form of Evangelization in the Context of Non-Christian Religions" (1971), *Eyes of Light*, p. 51. And *Diary*, p. 104 (6.7.55): "Jesus was the man in whom consciousness reached its ultimate depth."

174 *Letters*, p. 217 (RP, 10.7.69).

175 Odette Baumer-Despeigne: "The Spiritual Way of Henri Le Saux Swami Abhishiktānanda", *Bulletin of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue*, 1993, vol. 48, Oct., p. 20 (OB, 2.9.55).

176 *Diary,* p. 144 (9.2.56). Cf. Jung's Self-Ego axis. Jung is discussed in the Appendix to this thesis.

177 *Diary*, p. 287 (19.11.66). See also *Diary*, p. 357 (3.7.72) regarding this triple depth in ourselves.

3. Sin and Salvation

For Abhishiktānanda, salvation is the recognition of true being. But because of his conflicting ideas of the 'I am' experience, he also has different ideas about sin and salvation.

Abhishiktānanda says that in the West, we think of salvation as something to come from outside. The idea of sin is dualistic; it depends on two partners; the second has sinned against the former. But salvation takes place in the human heart, at the center of our being, where such a notion of partnership is impossible. Even the humility of a repentant sinner is impossible, since this would require projecting oneself before God.[178] Nor is salvation a salvation from Hell. "Hell is impossible!"[179]

He says that salvation is totally different than the intellectual acceptance of *theologoumena* (e.g., do you believe in the Church, in the resurrection).[180] Salvation involves a *metanoia*, conversion, an interior transformation. It is self-realization. Salvation is a *theopoêsis* or divination [deification], as was said by the Greek Fathers.[181]

Abhishiktānanda says that Jesus did not appear on the earth to teach notions but to share with humans an experience, his own, that of being Son of God.[182] Nor is salvation in any act in the realm of *nāmarūpa*, whether death, sacrifice, redemption, or resurrection. There is only one act by which Jesus–and anyone–passes to the Father: the act of awakening. Salvation is the awakening to the Presence of God, which is the awakening to one's Self.

> If at all I had to give a message, it would be the message of 'Wake up, arise, remain aware,' of the Katha Upanishad.[183]

In one place, Abhishiktānanda asks, 'Salvation"?—from what? Do Christians give the impression of being saved people?"[184] The very idea of salvation is *nāmarūpa*. Salvation means

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[178] "Jésus le Sauveur", *Intériorité*, (1970) p. 275, 279.

[179] *Diary*, p. 285 (20.10.66). Also *Diary*, p. 296 (7.10.67). But earlier in *Guhāntara* Abhishiktānanda said that humans could refuse to respond to God's gift of Himself in *kenosis*, and refuse to play with God in this love. They thus create for themselves a hell. Hell is not as unbelievable as the *kenosis* of nonbeing from Being.Hell is then the same as *māyā*, a pure dialectical momement and not a simple historical moment.

[180] Expérience spirituelle (anubhava) et dogmes" (1970), *Intériorité*, p. 214.

[181] Expérience spirituelle (anubhava) et dogmes" (1970), *Intériorité*, p. 215.

[182] "Archétypes religieux, expérience du soi et théologie chrétienne", *Intériorité*, p. 188.

[183] *Letters*, pp. 310, 311 (MR, 2.9.73).

nothing real to the humanist any more than to the Buddhist or the Vedāntin.[185] He says that for the Hindu, salvation is not in the future. Salvation is the experience of the Self. Salvation simply is, and when a person discovers that he is, he or she attains salvation (*mukta*).[186]

Sometimes Abhishiktānanda explains sin in existential terms as a condition of our being. It is the fact that we exist in a temporal world which is contingent. It is "that contingency of humanity which makes one a stranger to one's own being." It is discovering being "thrown in the world".[187] Sometimes he writes of this in a dualistic way, contrasting the soul with the body. He writes to Fr. Lemarié that beyond the sin of Adam there is another sin–the sin of Lucifer, which explains the material creation. The angelic sin is the sole possible explanation of the attachment of the spirit to the flesh.[188]

In relation to this idea of sin as a condition of our being, he says that the Hindu understands sin at an ontological depth of which both the Jew and also the Christianized Greek were incapable. The Upanishads speak of redemption from non-being instead of sin. The idea of sin depends on a Jewish context.[189] In Hindu theology, one cannot sin at the level that he or she really is.

> For the *advaitin*, sin is to deny in whatever fashion the "I am Brahma" [*brahma aham asmi]*, except at the purely pragmatic level which pertains to *māyā*.[190]

But is this really an adequate account of sin and evil? If we say that sin is merely part of the phenomenal world, does that not in some sense minimize the reality of evil in the world? But in fact our actions have an effect on others. And how can such effects be remedied? How is forgiveness possible? If we have wronged someone else, it does not make sense to say that sin is only a reality on the phenomenal plane, and that if this other person would only awaken to the true Self, there would be nothing to forgive.

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[184] *Letters*, p. 209 (AMS, 25.1.69).

[185] *Letters*, p. 286 (RP, 30.1.73).

[186] *Diary*, p. 80 (6.12.53).

[187] "Jésus le Sauveur", *Intériorité*, (1970) p. 279.

[188] *Lettres d'un sannyāsī chrétien à Joseph Lemarié*, p. 30.

[189] *Diary*, p. 245 (17.2.62).

[190] *Diary*, p. 110 (30.7.55).

Abhishiktānanda also says that to the awakened one, nothing evil can happen. He says that the Self draws everything to itself, when the Self is stripped of all ego.[191] That does not seem right, either. If we consider Jesus as an example or paradigm for us of what it is to be awakened to the Self, we must also acknowledge that he was crucified. That action against Jesus was evil, although Jesus may have forgiven it. In one place, Abhishiktānanda attempts to solve the problem by the idealist solution that Christ was those who were crucifying him:

> You who in Pilate were condemning Yourself,
> and in the Roman soldier were scourging Yourself.[192]

This is to take a very acosmic view of salvation. Such a view is also given in the following passage:

> Salvation is neither being nor non-being. Neither myself nor thyself nor he, neither personal nor impersonal. It is beyond the beyond [*parātparam*]. It is only there that we are freed from Heidegger's anguish, from the Buddha's "All is suffering" [*sarvam duhkham*], from the fear [*bhaya*] of the Upanishads. If I die, what then? Naciketas asks in the Katha Upanishad.[193]

Elsewhere, Abhishiktānanda gives a more intentional character to sin. It is being distant from God, a turning away from Being. It is a being that rejects being, which turns its back on itself. The source of sin here is ego [*ahamkāra*].[194]

> He who turns his back on the brilliant light of the *ātman* in the depths of his being resembles one who on the physical level destroys his own life.[195]

And in *Saccidānanda*, he says that sin is a deeper *kenosis* of being; it implies not only the natural deprivation of the fullness of the nature of Being, but a positive refusal of Being itself by the creature. This turning away from God is a refusal to be.[196]

Another interesting view of salvation is given in the following explanation by Abhishiktānanda, which is stated in terms of the Biblical story of temptation:

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[191] *Diary*, p. 383 (3.7.73).

[192] *Diary*, p. 174 (24.11.56).

[193] *Diary*, p. 293 (2.2.67).

[194] *Diary*, p. 226 (12.12.59). See also "Jésus le Sauveur", *Intériorité*, p. 286.

[195] *Meeting Point,* p. 69.

[196] *Saccidānanda*, pp. 122, 132 ft. 1.

> The Tempter says: If you eat of the fruit, you will become as God. The seer says: You are the very mystery of God. The mistake is to want to become God. When you want to become God, you cease to be him![197]

On this view, sin is wanting to ourselves be God, the Unmanifested. What does wanting to become God mean? One interpretation is that it means refusing to be a temporal being. As individuals we only exist in the manifested world, in the temporal world. We cannot exist in time if we are the Unmanifested outside of time. If sin is refusing to be a temporal being, this is precisely the opposite of saying that salvation is to become acosmic. Sin is when we absolutize ourselves or something in this world, refusing to recognize its temporal and relative nature. Using Jungian language, he says that salvation is when we regain our wholeness, or centre.[198] Using Taoist or perhaps Zen language, he says that salvation (m*ukti*) is pure spontaneity.[199]

If salvation is one's awakening, then it is not dependent on any particular acts in history involving Jesus. The orthodox Christian doctrine of atonement through the death of Christ can no longer be maintained.

> The saving name of Christ is *aham asmi* [I AM]. And the deep confession of faith is no longer the external 'Christ is Lord', but "*so'ham asmi*" [I am he].[200]

4. Prayer

Abhishiktānanda says that for the one who has experienced *advaita*, petitionary prayer is no longer possible, because the duality which makes it possible for one to think of oneself as standing in front of God has disappeared in the burning encounter with the Real.[201]

> This [*advaitic*] experience is no prayer, meditation or contemplation in the commonly accepted sense. It is a kind of consciousness, an awareness to which man finds himself raised beyond the reach of any of his faculties, hearing, seeing, feeling or even thinking.[202]

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[197] *Diary*, p. 362 (3.11.72).

[198] "Expérience spirituelle et dogmes", *Intériorité*, p. 213.

[199] *Diary*, p. 298 (22.5.68).

[200] *Letters*, p. 272 (MC, 16.6.72).

[201] *Abhishiktānanda*: "The Upanishads and the Advaitic Experience", *Clergy Monthly,* Dec. 1974, p. 474. He cites the Kena Upanishad 1.3.

[202] *Ibid.* Abhishiktānanda wrote an entire book on meditative prayer. *Prayer* (new edition) (ISPCK, 1999). He says that the book was intended to introduce some Christians into the path of *jñāna*, by way of their beliefs and myths,

Instead of prayer, we must aim at the silence of God.[203] Ramaṇa expresses a similar idea. He says that Western thinkers pray to God and finish with "Thy Will be done!" He comments:

> If His Will be done why do they pray at all? It is true that the Divine Will prevails at all times and under all circumstances. The individuals cannot act of their own accord. Recognise the force of the Divine Will and keep quiet.[204]

Abhishiktānanda says that God is to be found in the experience of our own I.[205] Prayer is to see God in any person, or in any creature with which we come in contact.[206]

5. Eucharist

Abhishiktānanda was troubled by the meaning of the Eucharist. Indian worship is cosmic, while the Eucharistic *anaphora* [the central prayer of the Eucharist] is the recapitulation of the history of salvation.[207] Some of his views of the Eucharist are very much influenced by the *kevala* idea:

> When I eat the Eucharist, I create the worlds. When I eat the Eucharist, I '*issue'* [send forth] the Son from the Father and am at the origin of the spring forth of the Spirit who fulfils God.[208]

Abhishiktānanda reinterprets the Eucharist. He says that the Eucharist is not there to take us out of ourselves into itself, but to lead us into ourselves. It is in the "depth" that the union of love itself, the essential fruit of the Eucharist, is completed.[209]

> The Eucharist tends towards the Revelation of the Purusha within me. Re-veal means un-veil, a-letheia.[210]

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without scaring them away. *Diary*, p. 307 (10.12.69). The French edition of *Prayer* has a final chapter demythologizing the language used throughout the book. It points to the experience of Ramana. See *Letters*, p. 222 (RP, 5.12.69). This chapter has been separately translated into English as *In Spirit and in Truth.*

[203] Cited by Donald Nicholl, Introduction to *Letters*, p. x.

[204] *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, p. 546.

[205] "Yoga and Christian Prayer", p. 477.

[206] *Prayer*, p. 14.

[207] *Letters*, p. 192 (L, 20.7.67).

[208] *Diary*, p. 47 (12.6.52).

[209] *Diary*, p. 72 (5.6.53).

[210] *Diary*, p. 285, (19.10.66).

The Eucharist is therefore not intended to lead us to a supernatural realm beyond ourselves. But it is intended to help us to see, to "feed on" *Brahman* in every being.[211]

> Eucharistic communion is the unique and *plenary expression* of the experience of being. the Presence of God is only plenary in the Eucharist. Whoever is involved in time attains the fulfillment of being in the Eucharist.[212]

Panikkar says that the Eucharist gave Abhishiktānanda a sense and proof of the reality of the world; otherwise all would dissolve into illusion.[213] It is the link between time and eternity.[214]

6. Institutions

Abhishiktānanda's dialogue with Hinduism was remarkably courageous. This is especially so when we consider that his experiences with Ramaṇa, Gnānānanda, and his experiences in the caves of Arunāchala, pre-date by many years the openness that was started by Vatican II. Vatican II encouraged dialogue with other religions. Vatican II held that there was a longing for God in other religions which it attributed to the work of the Holy Spirit. It was possible to work out one's eternal destiny without knowing of Christ's incarnation. As John Hick says, Vatican II opened the way to Rahner's view that there is salvation outside the Church, although not outside the atoning work of Christ. Some Catholic have since extended this to a theological pluralism that acknowledges salvation outside of Christ. Even these reports hold to a "special presence" of the Spirit within the Catholic Church.[215]

In his dialogue with Hinduism, Abhishiktānanda began with the view that the Church, to be fully Catholic, or universal, must integrate into her own life all nations, all cultures, and all languages. Just as Christianity incorporated Judaism and Greek thought, so the Church could incorporate Hindu thought. He believed that Christianity must be able to include the *advaitic*

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[211] *Diary*, p. 362 (24.12.72).

[212] *Diary*, p. 223 (3.11.59).

[213] Panikkar, Introduction to *Diary*, p. xxi.

[214] "Cheminements Intérieurs", *Intériorité*, p. 52. . See also Guhāja p. 44: Time attains eternity in each eucharistic consecration.

[215] John Hick: "The Latest Vatican Statement on Christianity and Other Religions", http://astro.temple.edu/~arcc/hick.html. Hick points out that other Catholics, like Cardinal Ratzinger, have not approved of these developments.

experience. In his early writings, he spoke of Christianity as crowning Hinduism, but in later years, this Christian triumphalism is not as evident. The original subtitle of *Sagesse* was "Advaitin Experience and its Trinitarian Fulfilment". When published, the subtitle was "du Vedānta à la Trinité." In *Sagesse*, which was published in 1965, Abhishiktānanda said that *advaita* and the doctrine of the Trinity complement each other. *Advaita* shows that the relations within the Trinity surpass what we can imagine; the Trinity shows the fullness of the One-without-a-second..

By the time of the English translation of Saccidānanda, he was no longer satisfied with a simple 'theology of fulfillment'. He no longer took it for granted that Hinduism would be destined to be crowned by Christianity.[216] He was also dissatisfied with finding superficial meeting points with Hinduism such as looking for "foreshadowings" of the Christian mystery in the Upanishads.

Up until his death, Abhishiktānanda offered Mass almost every day. But his writings show a great uneasiness with the institution of the Church. From soon after his arrival in India, Abhishiktānanda worried that the *advaitic* experience would make him have to reject the Church. "True *advaita* blows up the institutional Church of the Vatican."[217] As we have seen, he makes many references to the "explosion" of his ideas and concepts. Ideas and concepts are at the level of *nāmarūpa.* In 1972 he writes,

> Christ's *nāmarūpa* necessarily explodes, but the Church wants to keep us virtually at the level of the *nāmarūpa*.[218]

and

> Christianity believes that salvation comes from the outside, through thoughts rites, "sacraments". The level of *nāmarūpa*. Nothing comes from the outside, nothing that is made, *krita*, leads to what is un-made, *akrita*! (MundU I,2,12).[219]

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[216] *Letters*, p. 286 (MC, 4.2.73): "The whole thesis of Sagesse is outmoded.…Of all that I have written, Gnānānanda is almost the only thing that remains afloat. All the rest consists of *nāmarūpa* amusing itself with the 'theology of fulfillment.'"

[217] *Diary*, p. 144 (17.2.56).

[218] *Diary*, p. 346 (24.4.72).

[219] *Diary*, p. 352 (28.5.72).

He later came to accept that Christianity was only one view among many, and that the Church is for those who are not yet awakened.

> The Church then is only for the not-risen ones, for those who do not have the experience of the *asmi* [I am].[220]

Abhishiktānanda says that if the Church carries salvation, it is not as institution but as community.[221] He also says that the fundamental problem is existential, and that institutions "take an ever small place in my life."[222] He asks why the direct experience of the mystery of one's being cannot be experienced in the Church[223]*:*

7. Resurrection and Afterlife

Abhishiktānanda says that there are two basic experiences in Christianity: the 'I am' experience, and the experiences of the Apostles, who discovered Jesus to be alive after his death/resurrection.[224] These are two expressions of one mystery: "Christ is risen!"–'I am'; the twofold experience of a single mystery."[225] Resurrection is therefore the same as the 'I am' experience.[226]

The historical resurrection of Jesus cannot be proved absolutely. What is important is the appearance of Christ in his own life.

> Witnesses claim they have seen him; well that is a matter between them and him. As long as he has not appeared to me, their claims mean no more to me than the claims of the women did to the apostles.[227]

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[220] *Diary*, p. 286 (24.10.66). This in reference to Panikkar's view that Christianity was provisional, for the present time.

[221] "Jésus le Sauveur", *Intérioreté*, p. 291.

[222] *Letters*, p. 300 (RP 25.6.73).

[223] Odette Baumer-Despeigne: "The Spiritual Way of Henri Le Saux Swami Abhishiktānanda", *Bulletin of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue*, 1993, vol. 48, Oct., p. 21

[224] *Diary*, p. 332 (13.8.71).

[225] *Letters*, p. 218 (AMS, 24.8.69).

[226] "Théologoumenon Upasana (méditation) sur la Trinité", Intérioreté, p. 218.

[227] "The Upanishads and the Advaitic Experience", Clergy Monthly, Dec., 1974, p. 470.

Just as Abhishiktānanda has several different ideas about the 'I am' experience, so he has several ideas about what the resurrection and ascension means. In some places, it is clearly seen in terms of a Pure Consciousness experience, as when he describes Jesus' ascension:

> Everything sensible disappears, everything conceptual disappears, all that is left is the pure experience of Jesus in the Spirit, beyond all forms. The experience of Jesus in the *ātman*, as we should say here. Nothing of what is 'felt', and yet the 'sense' of the Spirit is more real than all that is 'felt'.[228]

and

> The resurrected state in the ascension to what is deepest: to discover that 'I' which awakes in *sushupti* [dreamless sleep], while the I of the waking state remains asleep. We must search for this fundamental 'I'–but then, an indistinguishable mass of Light, an ocean without horizon, where no one can any more know himself except in saying (hearing?) *Aham asmi* [I am] beyond all duality.[229]

He says that being beyond dualities means that one is also beyond death, since death and sin are on the plane of *māyā*, *dvandva*.[230] The resurrected Self is "of another order", "incommensurable with anything whatever."[231] The death of Jesus on Good Friday is described as liberation leaving the body (*videha-mukti*).[232] Good Friday is "the withdrawal of Jesus into the Self,"[233] "the return of the Lord to the bosom of the Father."[234]

In this view of Resurrection as Pure Consciousness, the body passes away.

> Only the body passes away: the 'I' which I utter with Jesus–addressing the Father–never has an end. 'I' do not die! Whoever believes in Jesus has passed from death to life.[235]

The 'I' that is separate from the Father ends, as did the 'I' of Jesus as being separate from the Father. Only the 'I' of the Father remains. At the ascension, ascension: Jesus disappears in

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[228] *Letters*, p. 212 (MT 5.5.69).

[229] *Letters*, p. 269 (MC, 30.5.72).

[230] "Sat-purusha", *Intériorité*, (Jan/73) p. 298

[231] *Letters*, p. 228 (M.4.3.70).

[232] "Cheminements Intérieurs", *Intériorité*, p. 50.

[233] *Diary*, p. 69 (30.3.53).

[234] *Diary*, p. 71 (4.4.53). It is the life hidden in God [*vita abscondita*, Col. 3:3]. *Diary,* p. 267 (29.3.64).

[235] *Letters*, p. 145 (MT 3.5.62).

the *guhā*.[236] The individual consciousness does not survive. Abhishiktānanda cites Br. Ar. Up. 4.5.14 "After the passing over, there is no longer consciousness"

In 1972, Abhishiktānanda writes that Jesus regained a body after his ascension, but a different body:

> He has reached that light–*tejas*–in the bosom of the Father, in his ascension with his body, *saśarīrah*; at his bodily death he reached it beyond death. He resumed his body again–beyond that detachment of the Purusha from (in) this body of mortal flesh. For it is at the boundary of the *śarīra* that we meet the Supreme [*uttamah*] *Purusha*[237]

One of the first statements Abhishiktānanda makes about resurrection is in *Guhāntara*. He describes the resurrection in terms of the *sahaja* experience. After one is purified in the *nirvikalpa* or *kevala* experience, one is resurrected in the *sahaja* experience.[238] One who has not died in the *nirvikalpa* experience continues to live in the body as a *jīvanmukti*. The continued existence in the body is explained by the doctrine of *prārabdha karma*.[239]

Abhishiktānanda also describes the resurrection of Jesus in terms of *nirvana*, as a state that is unthinkable by human beings. The Resurrection of Christ is not a return to life but the very opposite of death, *a-mrita*.[240]

With respect to his own death, Abhishiktānanda writes,

> I do not feel any special desire for an eternal individual life–do not these two adjectives in any case seem mutually contradictory?[241]

He also says that he does not deserve to live as an individual forever. He asks, Why should one *want* to survive, once one realizes he *is all*?[242]

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[236] *Diary*, p. 381 (7.5.73).

[237] *Diary*, p. 348 (11.5.72). This may still reflect the dualistic idea of separation of spirit and flesh. In a 1948 letter, he refers to the idea of Plotinus and Origen that the spirit is in anguish being dependent on matter, until the day of resurrection when the spirit assumes matter itself to its own condition. *Lettres d'un sannyāsī chrétien à Joseph Lemarié*, p. 30 (22.11.48).

[238] "Dans le Centre le Plus Profond", *Guhāntara* (unpublished).

[239] "Jusqu'`ā la Source, l'Expérience de Non-Dualité", *Initiation*, p. 62. He makes a similar statement in *Lettres d'un sannyāsī chrétien à Joseph Lemarié*, p. 261 (11.5.61): resurrection is the passage from the Hindu experience to the Christian experience.

[240] *Diary*, p. 156 (6.11.56).

[241] *Diary*, p. 52 (3.8.52).

But Abhishiktānanda does make many references to continued existence. Panikkar records that Abhishiktānanda did not give up a certain belief in resurrection; he would not accept Panikkar's harmonizing.[243] Sometimes this is expressed in musings about reincarnation. After his first few years in India, it felt to him that he had been there before.

> It almost makes me believe in rebirth! As if I were slowly waking up from a long dream of more than forty years.[244]

His most extensive thoughts about reincarnation are given in this passage:

> My form of existence in this body, at this time, in these circumstances, which began, as they tell me, on 30.8.10, does not *entirely account for me*. The Hindu myth of multiple rebirths means that I existed in the last century in one way, in this century I exist in another, and two centuries from now I will exist in yet another.[245]

Abhishiktānanda speaks here of his consciousness as an "accident" of himself, a garment. He says that he is not affected by the body. He acknowledges that while he has rejected a Greek dualism between soul and body, he is here accepting a Hindu dualism between Self and body.

He also refers to the past *karma* of Jesus. He refers to Jesus' mission as his *prārabdha*.[246]

It is unclear in the end whether Abhishiktānanda accepted the idea of reincarnation. Abhishiktānanda gives few details of what he believed occurred after death. But it does seem that he accepted some view of continuing existence. This would fit with his emphasis on the continued existence of the Many notwithstanding their unity in the One. During his own near death experience, he was convinced of his own continuing existence.

> While I was waiting on my sidewalk, on the frontier of the two worlds, I was magnificently calm, for I AM, no matter in what world![247]

As I have previously discussed, Abhishiktānanda's near death experience was not one of Pure Consciousness, since Abhishiktānanda was still able to observe and distinguish objects. In

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[242] Cited by Sara Grant, *Toward an Alternative Theology* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1991), p. 22.

[243] Panikkar: "Letter to Abhishiktānanda", p. 440.

[244] *Diary*, p. 194 (7.12.56).

[245] *Diary*, p. 245 (17.2.62). also *Diary*, p. 50 (17.7.52).

[246] *Diary*, p. 345 (24.4.72).

[247] *Letters*, p. 308 (MT, 9.8.73).

the last chapter, we also saw that Abhishiktānanda believed that some of our individuality continues and is not totally swallowed up in the experience of *Brahman*.

This sense of the survival of the Self is different from Loy's speculation of what might happen in the experience of *nirvana/moksha*. Loy says that there would not be a sense of merging into the One, but rather a sense of "disintegration, although not an annihilation."

> The boundaries of my ego-self, which distinguish me from others, would simply dissolve as "my mind" was realized to be not something separate from the world but a "focal point" of the world.

In view of Abhishiktānanda's description of his near death experience, I do not believe that he would agree with the word "disintegration" in relation to his experience. But he does agree that it would be a moving beyond the boundaries of the ego-self. He says after his experience that *advaita* is moving beyond that experience of duality which regards one's skin as the boundary between oneself and other people,

> For the experience of oneself, the foundation of everything and the background, the infrastructure of everything, is only one.[248]

If the experience is one of "disintegration", it is a disintegration of our ego-self that feels it is separate from others. But the *advaitic* experience is an integration into a much larger sense of connectedness.

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[248] *Diary*, p. 388 (12.9.73).

X. Conclusion and Further Explorations

A. Seeking a coherence

To make any conclusions about Abhishiktānanda's experience is necessarily to work at the conceptual level of *nāmarūpa*, names and forms. Abhishiktānanda emphasizes that what is important to experience *advaita*, and not to talk about it. "*Advaita* is not an idea…it *is*!".[1] He says that *advaita* can be discussed endlessly, because *advaita* defies all attempts to define it in concepts.[2] And the real truth of *advaita* is not to be written down at all, but rather spoken by the *guru* to the disciple.[3]

And yet Abhishiktānanda himself was very conceptual in many of his writings, and his concepts invite a conceptual response. He says that even those who are enlightened must return to the world of *nāmarūpa*. Concepts are necessary and unavoidable, as long as we recognize that they are also relative. But Abhishiktānanda did not want his own texts to be used just for intellectual satisfaction without the desire for conversion or awakening.[4] I have written the thesis from the standpoint that Abhishiktānanda did achieve a genuine *advaitic* experience. My purpose in exploring his ideas is for personal spiritual reasons as well as academic interest. It is easy to catch Abhishiktānanda's enthusiasm for *advaita*. I have regarded his words as pointers to an experience that he himself says can never be captured in concepts. Nevertheless, it seems to me that some of his concepts work better than others as pointers to the experience. Abhishiktānanda's own views changed over time. And in describing the experience, Abhishiktānanda is sometimes inconsistent. These changes in viewpoint and inconsistencies get in the way of understanding what it was that he was pointing to. Since he is not here to show us, we must attempt to make a coherence from the writings that he left.

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[1] *Letters* p. 227 (RV, 8.3.70).

[2] *Meeting Point*, p. 105.

[3] *Letters*, p. 267 (OB 22.5.72).

[4] *Letters*, p. 239 (OB 20.11.70).

Abhishiktānanda himself was aware of the inconsistencies in his thought. In his Introduction to *Guhāntara*, he says that it is not a thesis. It is in the form of separate essays, often with a lack of logical connection. He says that much of the testimony has a "primitive and spontaneous character", and that these essays should be regarded as probings often on "the extreme frontiers of thought." He warns against premature systematization of these ideas. Nevertheless he wanted to publish *Guhāntara*. He says that there are risks to be taken, and that the book is intended to invite the reader to participate in the dazzling illuminations (*éblouissements*) of the research.[5]

He described his ideas in his *Diary* as "vectors of free-floating research" that were not intended for publication. He says that these ideas can only be understood from within the experience from which those vectors well up.[6] It must be remembered that his experience was one of being torn between his Christian tradition and the *advaita* that he wished to experience. Abhishiktānanda's quest was filled with uncertainties and anguish; these doubts tortured him right up until the year before he died. For example, I have referred to his fear that in seeking the *advaitic* experience, he was risking his eternal soul for what might be only a "mirage". My attempted systematization of his ideas is therefore not meant to be a substitute for the record of his lived experience–the experimental, trial and error approach that he took in attempting to live out his ideas, and his fear in doing so.

I have discussed Abhishiktānanda's understanding of non-monistic *advaita* in terms of perception, thinking, action, ontology and theology. This has helped to clarify which dualities Abhishiktānanda believes are overcome in the *advaitic* experience. It has also helped to clarify what he means by "non-monistic", and the diversity that he is thereby attempting to safeguard.

My exploration of Abhishiktānanda's understanding of non-monistic *advaita* has also surprised me in several ways. I have been surprised at the extent to which his idea of non-monistic *advaita* derives from his Christian trinitarian beliefs, although he finds analogues of this within Hinduism. I also did not expect to conclude that Abhishiktānanda did not achieve the *kevala* experience of *advaita*. As I have discussed, although his disciple Chaduc may have

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[5] Draft Introduction to *Guhāntara* (unpublished), p. 3.

[6] Note by Chaduc, cited *Diary, p. 282* (1.7.74).

achieved that experience, Abhishiktānanda's own experience was his near-death experience in his heart attack. Although that appears to have been an *advaitic* experience, it was not an experience of Pure Consciousness.

In this concluding chapter of the thesis, I will discuss these inconsistencies and surprises. I end the chapter with a brief summary of my findings.

B. Christian Trinitarianism

From the beginning of his time in India, Abhishiktānanda was unwilling to accept a monistic view of Vedānta because it conflicted with his Christianity. In the introduction to *Guhāntara,* he says that the Christian will never accept the metaphysical Hindu synthesis, whether or Shankara or Rāmānuja.[7] In many of his writings, he writes of his desire to "purify" Hindu ideas like *māyā.* Abhishiktānanda wanted Hindus to rediscover the reality of the diversity of the world. He writes to Fr. Lemarié that the final part of *Guhāntara* was an effort "almost imploring the rediscovery the reality of *vyakta* (the manifested)."[8] Abhishiktānanda wanted to use this idea of *vyakta* to express the individuality and specificity that are given in the Christian revelation.

As I have discussed, Abhishiktānanda regards the *advaitic* experience itself as a purifying stage before the full trans-*advaitic* experience, which for him is Christian Trinitarianism. He says that the "death" that is experienced in *advaita* is an essential stage in one's growth into oneself.[9] Elsewhere he says *advaita* is a providential means of purification offered to the Church.[10]

In his argument for adding a trinitarian experience to *advaita*, Abhishiktānanda seems to assume that *advaita* alone is a kind of monistic experience. *Advaita* is the *kevala*, the aloneness, or what he called *esseulement*. It is an experience of the infinite solitude of God, not solitude with God, nor in God, not of the alone to the Alone, nor of the alone with Alone, but the Alone

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[7] *Ibid.* p. 9.

[8] *Lettres d'un sannyāsī chrétien à Joseph Lemarié*, p. 103 (17.3.54).

[9] *Saccidānanda*, p. 83.

[10] *Meeting Point*, p. 106

infinitely and essentially alone. It is the experience of *ekam advitīyam*, the One-without-a-Second. It is an experience of the unity where there is no place for the distinction between knower and known, lover and loved; this is the night of St. John of the Cross.[11]

For Abhishiktānanda, the *kevala* experience is therefore the equivalent of the "dark night of the soul" of the Christian mystics. It is to be followed by the trinitarian experience. This is how Monchanin had described the Hindu *kevala*, *esseulé*, as being sublimated to trinitarian thought after a crucifying dark night of the soul.[12] And it is also how Lacombe saw the *advaitic* experience: that it is completed or fulfilled by the Christian revelation.[13]

But for Abhishiktānanda the *kevala* experience is not a complete ontological monism, since he believes that there is always the possibility of the trans-*advaitic* experience. But the *kevala* is experienced as a total aloneness. It is the destruction of all concepts of truth, self and reality that one had formed before the experience. It is an emptying of all our words and concepts and even imagination.[14] Any ideas of distinction from God that one had had before the experience must also be surrendered, at least the type of distinction based on the empirical world.[15]

Although the source of Abhishiktānanda's trinitarianism was Christian doctrine, he develops it in a way that is far from orthodox. He interprets it in terms of Being, where the Father is the Unmanifested, the Son is the Manifested Reality, and the Spirit is the union between the two. It is thus an idea of both unity and diversity in a nondual relationship. Abhishiktānanda develops this trinitarian insight in most of his writings. The idea is central to *Saccidānanda*. His

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[11] *Initiation,* p. 58.

[12] Ysabel de Andia: "Jules Monchanin, La Mystique Apopthatique et l'Inde", *Jules Monchanin: Regard croisés d'Occident et d'Orient*, (Lyon: Profac-Credic, 1997), p. 128.

[13] Olivier Lacombe: "Orient et Occident", Études Carmélitaines: Mystiques et Missionaires, April/1931, vol. 16, p. 133-159. This is probably why Abhishiktānanda wanted Lacombe to be one of the readers of *Guhāntara*. See *Lettres d'un sannyāsī chrétien à Joseph Lemarié*, p. 103 (17.3.54). Gozier says that he interviewed Lacombe, who said that Abhishiktānanda had not sufficiently studied the evolutio of the Upanishads. He says that Abhishiktānanda only retained the results [Shankara] but not the meandering of Indian thought. Andre Gozier: *Le père Henri Le Saux à la rencontre de l'hindouisme* (Paris: Centurion,_1988).

[14] *Guhāja*, p. 7.

[15] "Dans le Centre le plus Profond", *Guhāntara* (unpublished).

most radical statements are in *Guhāntara* and the other essays that are published in *Intériorité.*[16] But Abhishiktānanda wavers about the way that he has expressed this trinitarianism. In 1972, when he says that he knows the Upanishads are true, he also says that he believes that what he said in *Saccidānanda* is true, even if badly expressed.[17] Less than a year later he says that the whole trinitarian thesis in *Saccidānanda* had collapsed.[18] And yet even when he says the structure of his thought has collapsed, Abhishiktānanda retains the insight into unity and diversity that was the basis for his trinitarian thought:

> The trinitarian mystery is the expansion into a magnificent statement, *namarupa*, of the deep experience at the same time of unity, of non-duality and relationship. It is the realization of the eternity of my relationship with my human brother, etc. But to try to produce a new trinitarian theology only leads to dead ends. It means that one is still under the spell of *mythos* and *logos*. It is simply to replace *theos* by *theo-logica* and to confuse the idea of God with God[19]

Therefore, the collapse was only of certain theological ways of expressing the insight and not the insight of unity, nonduality and relationship. And even if Abhishiktānanda was unhappy about his theological expression of this idea, he came back to trinitarianism in his interpretation of his *guru* relationship with Chaduc, where the Father is engendered by the Son's experience.

Abhishiktānanda's Christian Trinitarianism therefore influenced his understanding of non-monistic *advaita*. Despite this influence, his ideas cannot simply be written off as Christian propaganda. For it must be remembered that religious traditions evolve. This applies to Hinduism as well as to Christianity. Abhishiktānanda's ideas are almost certainly different from orthodox Christianity; his trinitarianism evolved. Abhishiktānanda was attempting real religious dialogue. And in true religious dialogue, changes will occur to each side involved in the dialogue. Abhishiktānanda discovered that he was sometimes considered too Christian for Hindus, and too Hindu for Christians.[20]

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[16] James Stuart advises me that an English translation is being planned for *Intériorité.*

[17] *Diary*, p. 349 (11.5.72).

[18] *Diary*, p. 369, (2.2.73).

[19] *Ibid.*

[20] That was the mixed reaction of those to whom he showed his work *Guhāntara*. See *Letters*, p. 78 (L, 4.3.55).

This view–that *advaita* is a monistic experience, and that the Christian experience is a higher level experience–has been proposed by Zaehner.[21] It is also the position taken by Stoeber, who sees a monistic stage even within the Christian experience. That is how he interprets Abhishiktānanda.[22] But Stoeber does not take into account how radically Abhishiktānanda has reinterpreted and even rejected theism. Nor does Stoeber take into account the second argument by Abhishiktānanda: that *advaita* itself is not monistic, but that a trinitarian viewpoint is included even within Hinduism. I will now discuss this second argument.

C. Equivalents to non-monistic advaita *within Hinduism*

Not all of Abhishiktānanda's arguments for non-monistic *advaita* are based upon his Christian beliefs. Many of his writings are devoted to the argument that Hinduism itself has within it a view of unity and diversity. As Panikkar says, Christianity is not the only religion with a trinitarian belief.[23] The argument that Hinduism can be interpreted this way is quite different from the first argument of Christian trinitarianism. In the first argument, Abhishiktānanda assumes that to some extent, the *advaitic* experience is monistic, and that it is fulfilled by a trinitarian experience. In this second argument, he is searching for a way to find diversity within *advaita* itself.

1. The Upanishads

Abhishiktānanda refers especially to the early Upanishads, which give not only a monistic view of *Brahman*, but also a view of the diversity of the world as emanating from *Brahman*. Abhishiktānanda also liked the *Īśa* Upanishad, which speaks of "fullness everywhere." He says that this Upanishad asserts the reality of God's self-manifestation in the world:

> The world is not devoid of truth or reality; it is not *māyā* or illusion, except when it is thought of as separated from the One who reveals himself in it, since its

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[21] R.C. Zaehner: *Mysticism Sacred and Profane (*Oxford: Clarendon, 1957, reprinted 1973).

[22] Michael Stoeber: *Theo-monistic mysticism* (St. Martins Press, 1994).

[23] Panikkar: *The Silence of God: The Answer of the Buddha* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1989), p. 221, ft. 163.

> whole reason for existing, its very nature as a sign, consists precisely in making him manifest.[24]

Abhishiktānanda's interpretation of the *Iśa* Upanishad is that *ātman* is motionless in all that moves, the one in what is multiple, and that it is simultaneously interior and exterior to all things, everywhere identical with itself. He says that this Upanishad could form the basis for a Christian understanding of Vedānta.

As I have discussed, Abhishiktānanda's opinions regarding the Upanishads has been confirmed by some Western scholars.[25] There are two views of Brahman in the Upanishads. Even Shankara is not necessarily monistic. But Vedānta after Shankara became more rigid. In Abhishiktānanda's terminology, "dialectics" took over. The supple and pregnant notion of *advaita* becomes "sclerosed" into something close to monism or pantheism.[26] Instead of holding both views of *Brahman* in tension, this later thought identifies the world with *Brahman*, and thereby denies the reality of the diversity of the world.

In support of this argument that *advaita* is not monistic, Abhishiktānanda emphasizes that *māyā* does not mean illusion, and that the world has a reality, although a reality that is wholly dependent on *Brahman*. *Māyā* is the *śakti* of Shiva and produces the world. Scholars agree that sources of thought like *tantra* and Kashmir *Śaivism* view both unity and diversity as real; the world is produced by the *śakti* of Shiva. As I have shown, these sources were very influential for Abhishiktānanda. Ramaṇa was also influenced by *tantric* ideas, and Gnānānanda had been influenced by Kashmir *Śaivism*. Abhishiktānanda was acquainted with both of these traditions very early on, through these contacts, and through the writings of Silburn.[27] Abhishiktānanda's contact with these traditions was not a late development in his life, as Panikkar has asserted.

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[24] *Meeting Point*, p. 67.

[25] The ideas of Paul Hacker, Rudolf Otto, Raimon Panikkar, Caroline Franks Davies and Pratima Bowes are consistent with Abhishiktānanda's non-monistic interpretation of the Upanishads. A contrary viewpoint is expressed by Gispert-Sauch, who says that Abhishiktānanda was too selective in his use of texts from the Upanishads. G. Gispert-Sauch: "Exploring the Further Shore", *Vidyajyoti*, Vol. 40, 502-506.

[26] "L'épiphanie de Dieu", *Intériorité*, p. 123.

[27] It is interesting that Silburn's main source for Kashmir *Śaivism* was Swami Lakshman Joo. He visited Ramaṇa in 1938, and said that he received *drishtidarshan* at that moment. Bettina Bäumer: article in *Mountain Path*, 1993.

Whether traditions like Kashmir *Śaivism* and *tantra* are exact analogues of Abhishiktānanda's trinitarianism may be debated. Do they really emphasize the importance of the temporal, diversified world? Although it emphasizes the real nature of the world, Kashmir *Śaivism* also has a very strong desire for everything to return to the One. And Hacker says that although Vedānta has a tendency to logically identify the self with *Brahman*, in *tantric* nondualism, there is even less caution and reluctance to view the identity of the absolute as something to be desired and acquired.[28] Even this desire for a return to the One is not necessarily inconsistent with Abhishiktānanda's views. Abhishiktānanda also expresses a desire for a return to the One, the Father, the Pleroma. For Abhishiktānanda, this One is not a monistic One, but has community or *koinonia* at its heart. It is in this emphasis of community at the heart of being that we see Abhishiktānanda's Christian Trinitarianism showing itself again. But according to Loy, *tantra* also has within it a view of reality as not wholly monistic, but as static and dynamic.[29]

2. *Aneka*

As I have mentioned above in various contexts, one of the words that Abhishiktānanda uses in reference to Hindu thought is *aneka*. He says that reality is both *advaita (non-dual*) and *aneka* (not-one). For example, in *Ermites*, he refers to the Hindu intuition that is at the same time of the not-one (*an-ekam*) and not-two (*a-dvaitam),* both of which are ineffable.[30] He refers to *aneka* in both *Guhāntara*[31] and *Guhāja*.[32] In *Saccidānanda,* he writes that God is not-one, *an-eka*, and also not-two, *a-dvaita*.[33] In a glossary at the end of *Saccidānanda*, he also defines *an-eka* as meaning "not-one.[34] But although Abhishiktānanda gives numerous quotations from

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[28] Hacker "The Search for Identity in Indian Philosophy", Halbfass: *Tradition and Reflection: Explorations in Indian Thought*, p. 256.

[29] *Nonduality*, p. 270.

[30] *Ermites* , p. 39.

[31] "Dans le Centre le plus Profond", *Guhāntara* (unpublished).

[32] *Guhāja*, pp. 28, 81, 132 (unpublished).

[33] *Saccidānanda*, p. 135.

[34] Monier Williams provides a definition for *aneka*: "not one, many, much, separated", but gives no references for it.

Hindu writings to support the doctrine of *advaita*, he does not give the source for this idea of *aneka.* In one letter, he writes of the necessity of "*a-advaita*" [not *advaita*].[35]

Now it is certainly true that the issue of the relation between the One and the Many occupied much of Indian thought. For example, the stories of creation refer to the creation of the Many:

> In the beginning this was the Self alone, in the form of Man. Looking around he saw nothing whatever except himself. He said in the beginning: "I am" and thence arose the name "I." So, even today, when a man is addressed, he says in the beginning, "It is I," and then adds any other name he may have.
>
> […}He was afraid; so, even today, one who is all alone is afraid.
>
> […] He found no joy; so, even today, one who is all alone finds no joy. He yearned for a second…[36]

and

> Brahman desired: "Would that I could become many! Let me procreate!" He practiced fervid concentration, he created the whole world, all that exists.[37]

Although these Upanishads speculate about the origin of the Many from the One, the word *aneka* does not appear.

As mentioned earlier in this thesis, it is possible that Abhishiktānanda obtained the idea of *aneka* from the *Śivādvaita* view of a plurality of *jivātman* (*aneka-jiva-vāda*).[38] This may explain the use by Abhishiktānanda of the term *aneka* in the sense of 'not-one.'

It is also possible that Abhishiktānanda learned the word *aneka* through his contacts with Gnānānanda and with the Sivānanda ashram. We know that monks from the Sivānanda ashram stayed with Gnānānanda. And Abhishiktānanda later had close ties with Swami Chidananda from the Sivānanda ashram. Chidananda uses the word *aneka* in a book where he discusses the ideas of Sivānanda:

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[35] *Lettres d'un sannyāsī chrétien à Joseph Lemarié*, p. 38. Abhishiktānanda refers to the need to be purified in a long immersion of *advaita* (*a-advaita*).

[36] Bṛhadāranyaka Upanishad I.4.1-4 (translation from Panikkar's *The Vedic Experience).*

[37] Taittirīya Upanishad II.6.1. (translation from Panikkar's *The Vedic Experience).*

[38] As discussed by Monchanin in "Note D: Māyā", *Ermites*, pp. 88-92. Monchanin refers to a work on *Sivādvaita* by S.S. Suryanaravana Sastri. The term *jivātman* means "individual self".

> There is a chasm of relativity between us, the individual souls caught in the *aneka* (many), and the *ekameva'dvitiyam* (the Absolute).
>
> This act of multiplying and reproducing is present everywhere. It saturates and permeates the whole universe because from the angle of cosmology, the entire universe is the outcome of such a primal first wish for multiplication. "I am One, may I become many." Thus the *Vedas* say that there was one imponderable, mysterious Being. What that Being was, who knows, because that Being was one without a second. So, a second not being present, not existing how can there arise the question of anyone cognizing that Being? Who was there to cognize when that—*Ekameva'dvitiyam Brahma* (God) alone existed? And in that mysterious Being there arose this germ of an idea. He thought: "May I become many. I am One, may I become many." That is how they try to explain the genesis of the *advitiya* and the *aneka* from the *Ekameva'dvitiya.* And, therefore, the concept of multiplication is at the very heart and essence of existence because it arose from Brahma and therefore it is present everywhere.[39]

Whether or not Abhishiktānanda learned the term *aneka* through his contacts with Sivānanda ashram, this quotation from Chidananda shows that Abhishiktānanda is not alone in using the term *aneka*. The word is therefore represented in at least some Hindu traditions. It may be questioned whether Chidananda's ideas as expressed here reflect orthodox Vedāntic thought or whether they are more representative of *tantric* ideas. His ideas may also be a result of the influence of neo-Hinduism. As we have seen, representatives of neo-Hinduism like Aurobindo (in his "*advaitic* realism") have also emphasized both the unity and diversity of the world.[40]

The idea of *aneka* is also found in the *Puranas*, a much later development than Vedānta. We can find in the *Puranas* the idea of *Ekaneka-Svarupa* (from *eka* one + *aneka* not one, many + *svarupa* one's own form or shape). *Ekaneka-Svarupa* therefore means "single yet manifold in one's own form." The idea is applied in the Puranas to *Brahma*: although the aspect of *Brahma* is single yet it manifests in multiform expressions.[41]

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[39]Swami Chidananda: *Twenty Important Spiritual Instructions* (Divine Life Society, 1993), available online at http://www.sivanandadlshq.org/download/20instrch.htm. It is of course possible that Chidananda obtained this term from his contacts with Abhishiktānanda.

[40] Monchanin saw an analogy between Aurobindo' s metaphysics and the *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha*. *Jules Monchanin: Mystique de l'Inde, mystère chrétien*, ed. Suzanne Siauve (Paris: Fayard, 1974), p. 310.

[41]*Encyclopedic Theosophical Glossary (*Theosophical University Press, 1999), available online at http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/etgloss/ea-el.htm.

Abhishiktānanda's use of the word *aneka* in conjunction with *advaita* weakens his argument that the word *advaita* alone includes both unity and diversity. Some contemporary writers like Ken Wilber speak of *advaita* itself as "not-two, not-one." Wilber does not use the term *aneka*, but merely asserts the meaning of nonduality as including both meanings.[42]

D. The inconsistency between *kevala* and *sahaja*

1. Pure Consciousness versus the awareness of interrelation

The inconsistency between *kevala*[43] and *sahaja* became evident in the discussion of Perception (Chapter V). Abhishiktānanda speaks of the nondual awakening in terms of perception, of just opening one's eyes. Our true perception is veiled by superimpositions we bring to our experience. Eliminating these superimpositions shows us reality as it is. This is done by meditation, yoga, or even by psychoanalysis. All these methods allow us to get beyond our ego and the superimpositions of our thought. But there is a fundamental inconsistency in Abhishiktānanda as to whether the state of enlightenment is one of Pure Consciousness (*kevala* or *nirvikalpa*) or whether it is the *sahaja* state of the *jīvanmukti*, who sees *Brahman* in everything.

Abhishiktānanda says that in the first state, *kevala*, the distinction between subject and object has disappeared. There is no consciousness of anything at all; Ramaṇa likens it to a trance. Forman and Griffiths refer to this experience as a Pure Consciousness experience. In such a Pure Consciousness experience there is no content, and all distinctions disappear. Abhishiktānanda acknowledges that to refer to *kevala* is to use monistic, pure language.[44] He describes *kevala* in terms of the yogic goal, the experience of the aloneness of the *ātman*:

> He [the yogi] reaches what tradition calls the state of *kaivalyam*, that is to say, of isolation, of simply *being*. In that state at the level of pure awareness he is

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[42] *One Taste: The Journals of Ken Wilber,* (Boston: Shambhala, 1999) p. 135.

[43] As I have discussed, both Ramaṇa and Abhishiktānanda also use the word *nirvikalpa* to refer to this *kevala* state of Pure Consciousness.

[44] *Diary,* p. 72 (26.8.53). Abhishiktānanda says that it would be less monistic to refer to the state as "being in God."

> stripped of all that is not essentially and permanently himself, of all in him that is relative and changing, especially the *vṛitti* or ceaseless eddies of his thought.[45]

The second state, *sahaja*, is the state of the *jīvanmukta*, who sees the unity of all things, and *Brahman* in everything. According to Abhishiktānanda, unless we die during this *nirvikalpa* experience, it is followed by a return to the world in *sahaja* awareness. This is the awareness of the *jīvanmukta*, the one who is liberated while in the body. When the *jīvanmukta* returns to the empirical world, he or she sees the interrelatedness of all things, and sees *Brahman* pervading the universe. Such nondual perception does not negate the reality of the world and does not negate the distinction among things. It is a nondual perception that is not monistic.

2. Inconsistency within Hinduism itself

The inconsistency between the state of *kevala* (the experience of the aloneness of the *ātman*) and that of *sahaja* (seeing *Brahman* within all things) is an inconsistency not only in Abhishiktānanda's thought, but one within Hinduism and Vedānta itself. As Fort says, Vedānta has two ideas of *mukti*: freedom from *saṃsāra* and knowledge of *Brahman/ātman*. The first view, freedom from *saṃsāra*, is a more negative idea of liberation. It usually requires some form of world renunciation and some kind of yogic practice; it ends in the perfect isolation (*kaivalya*) of the spirit.[46] This view is also connected with seeing the world as *māyā* in terms of illusion.

The second view of liberation is knowledge of *Brahman/ātman*. In this second view, some Vedāntic thought holds that there can be liberation when one is in a body, with the mind and the senses. The one who is liberated in the body is the *jīvanmukti*. Full liberation is only gained after death (in *videhamukti*). But this idea of *jīvanmukti* allows for the continuing function of the liberated person within the world of diversity. This idea of *jīvanmukti* is not at all universally accepted within Hinduism. Indeed, as Fort has shown, the entire idea of the *jīvanmukti* probably derives from *tantric* sources, and is connected with the *tantric* ideas of the

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[45] *Saccidānanda*, p. 32.

[46] Andrew O. Fort: *Jīvanmukti in Transformation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), p. 6.

reality of the world, and of *māyā* in terms of the *śakti* or energy of Shiva.[47] The idea of *jīvanmukti* was accepted by Ramaṇa and also by Abhishiktānanda. In his meeting with Ramaṇa's disciple Shastri in November, 1953, Abhishiktānanda was made aware of the importance of *śakti*. After this meeting, Abhishiktānanda writes of awakening to being as the awakening to *śakti* and *kundalini*.[48] The *jīvanmukti* is his ideal for the *sannyāsī.*[49]

Abhishiktānanda was aware that the idea of *jīvanmukti* is contested within Hinduism. He says that academic discussions about its possibility leave him quite cold. For him, the *jīvanmukti* is the person who returns from the death that liberates. He is the one who has cut those knots that make him identify himself with the various levels at which he is manifested. He is himself, but even so he is other than he was before:

> For everywhere he goes, there is the fathomless depth of the experience of the beyond, of the *ātman-brahman*, and those three-fourths of him which belong to the other world are now integrated into his concrete existence.[50]

Even for those who believe in the possibility of *jīvanmukti*, there is a further problem. There are those who argue that the only reason that the *jīvanmukti* can continue to function in the world is because of his or her *prārabdha karma*. On this view the *jīvanmukti* is not really participating in the world. However, another opinion is that the *jīvanmukti* is participating in the world out of a mission to save the world or to do good in the world. Fort argues that this second opinion is not found within traditional Hinduism; it is a Western conception.[51] It may also be linked to the Buddhist idea of the *bodhisattva*.

When Abhishiktānanda arrived in India, his idea of *advaita* was that of *nirvikalpa samādhi*. He was disappointed in the fact that Ramaṇa seemed so ordinary, and that he

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[47] Hagiographical sources say that Shankara became a *jivanmukta*. But according to Fort, Shankara only uses the word *jivanmukta* once, and he never directly describes the state. Shankara believes in the possibility of living liberation, and his writings set many of the parameters for subsequent discussion of living liberation. But because of his devaluation of empirical reality, Shankara does not emphasize the functioning of a liberated person in the world of diversity. He is more concerned with how the body can continue in existence. Fort contrasts this with the "in the world monism of Tantra or Kāśmiri Śaivism." *Ibid.*, pp. 6 and 31-46.

[48] *Diary*, p. 160 (12.11.56).

[49] *Ermites*, p. 155.

[50] "An Approach to the Upanishads", *Further Shore*, p. 106. The reference is to the idea expressed in the Vedas that the world derives from one fourth of *Purusha*; the other three fourths remained unmanifested.

[51] Fort, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

participated in everyday activities. Over time, Abhishiktānanda came to appreciate the idea of *jīvanmukti*. He did not seem to appreciate the difference between the interpretation of the *jīvanmukti's* actions as due to *prārabdha karma*, and the interpretation that the *jīvanmukti* was actively doing good. In *Guhāja*, Abhishiktānanda identifies these two ideas he says that the Christian idea of vocation is called *prārabdha karma* in Hinduism.[52]

Abhishiktānanda's conception of *advaita*, insofar as it affirms the reality of the world, and the possibility of liberation as a *jīvanmukti*, follows a *tantric* view of *advaita*. This of course fits with his Christian bias of reality having both unity and diversity. He compares the state of the *jīvanmukti* to that of resurrection to new life.

Abhishiktānanda believed that the *kevala* (or *nirvikalpa*) state was a necessary stage in order to attain to the *sahaja* state. This view conflicts with Ramaṇa's own opinion.

3. Inconsistencies in Ramaṇa's Story

Ramaṇa himself held that the trance of *nirvikalpa samādhi* is not necessary in order to achieve the *sahaja* state. The method that he recommended for enlightenment is that of Self-Enquiry. Ramaṇa criticized meditation as often leading to the inflation of the ego of the meditator.[53]

This raises an interesting question. If Ramaṇa is correct, that meditation and *nirvikalpa samādhi* are not necessary, what does this do to Ramaṇa's own story of enlightenment? He is venerated for having been in a trance state during his first period of time at Tiruvanammalai. Abhishiktānanda held Ramaṇa in higher esteem precisely because of his trance experience. If Ramaṇa says that trance is unnecessary, what is the basis of his enlightenment? Is his trance more related to the fact that even as a boy he had periods of profound sleep when no one could wake him? Ramaṇa traces his enlightenment to his enactment of death when he was a boy. Neither that experience nor his actual near death experience several years later was an experience of Pure Consciousness. He was able to distinguish others; it was more an experience of the continuity of the Self. Ramaṇa himself commented on his propensity for "fits". Ramaṇa's

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[52] *Guhāja*, p. 88.

[53] His view that meditation is not necessary is similar to Shankara's opinion.

interpretation of his enlightenment was in terms of *sahaja samādhi*. He relates this to seeing *Brahman* in everything, and interprets the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* in this way. I have concluded that this text, and others like the *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha*, the *Ribhu Gita*, the *Tripura Rahasya*, and the *Tayumanavar* play a larger role in Ramaṇa's interpretation of his experience than is generally acknowledged. It may be that his own experience was able to go beyond those texts, but they seem to be the source of his idea of Self-Enquiry.

Ramaṇa is inconsistent in explaining his own continued action as a *jīvanmukti* in the *sahaja* state. At times he acknowledges the reality of the world, although he says that it is a reality dependent on *Brahman.* But at other times he takes a very illusionistic view of the world. We know that he took an active interest in some activities, such as cooking, devotion to his mother (both before and after her death), and looking after animals. He read the newspaper and his mail. These activities certainly look like real involvement in the world. Ramaṇa tries to explain them as *prārabdha karma,* and says he is not really acting. It would be more consistent for him to say that he is really participating in the real world created by *śakti.* But perhaps by saying he is not really acting, he means that he is acting without *karmic* consequences because he is not acting out of personal ego or attachment.|[54]

4. The return

For Abhishiktānanda, the *sahaja* experience of the *jīvanmukti* is equivalent to the resurrection. There is a return to the world after the dark night of the soul of the *kevala* experience.[55]

Beatrice Bruteau interprets this return in Taoist terms. She compares the *sahaja* state with the Taoist natural state, a harmony in the mutual interaction of all beings which arises if not interfered with by arbitrary external and artificial means. She says that in the return the ordinary daily life is back, but it is transformed…

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[54] See "Forty Verses", *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, p. 76 (v. 38) and p. 81 ("Supplement to Forty Verses", v.30).

[55] Even if one has died in the *nirvikalpa* experience, Abhishiktānanda believes there is some form of resurrection. As already discussed, there is no unanimous agreement in Hinduism regarding the possibility of a return.

> The self-realized person has the mind of a child–unselfconscious, spontaneous, utterly pure in its sincerity and genuineness, in immediate and honest contact with the realities it meets, unblocked and uncomplicated, free and fluid, possessing sense for the right, the true and the harmonious.[56]

Bruteau cites Abhishiktānanda's words from Swami Gnānānanda:

> The *jñāni* lives in the world like every one else; he eats, drinks, sleeps and walks about, just like everyone else. However, while others are primarily aware of the diversity of things, the *jñāni* sees them in their unity.[57]

This statement by Gnānānanda is similar to what was said by Ramaṇa, comparing the enlightened person to the unenlightened:

> To those who have not realized (the Self) as well as to those who have realized, the world is real. But to those who have not realized, Truth is adapted to the measure of the world, whereas to those that have realized, Truth shines as the Formless Perfection, and as the Substratum of the world.[58]

The unenlightened see Truth only according to "the measure of the world"–that is, in terms of dualism and diversity. He says that the enlightened person sees *Brahman* as the substratum of the world. This idea of "substratum" is what Ramaṇa must mean when he stresses the importance of seeing *Brahman* in all things.

Can this view of *Brahman* be compared to the Tao, which also gives rise to all things? The use of the word 'substratum' gives a reified sense of reality, and may itself be criticized as viewing reality according to "the measure of the world." But Bruteau's comparison was more with the enlightened person living in the world, apparently like everyone else, but with a different perspective. A Taoist view of Abhishiktānanda's idea of enlightenment is supported by the following passage from Abhishiktānanda:

> Recover the state of communion [inter-relation] in which a child is before it has distinguished its I. […] *Wou-wei.* The Ganges does not flow in order to irrigate. It does not seek to irrigate, to fertilize; it just flows […] stop thinking, stop acting, let the Ganges flow.[59]

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[56]Beatrice Bruteau: "In the Cave of the Heart: Silence and Realization*", New Blackfriars* (1984), p. 315. She refers to Lao-Tzu and Chuang-Tzu.

[57] *Guru*, p. 73.

[58] "Forty Verses", *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, p. 70 (v. 18).

[59] *Diary*, p. 312 (16.4.70).

A Taoist interpretation of Abhishiktānanda makes some sense. Abhishiktānanda refers to the spontaneous action of the enlightened person, the action of *wu-wei*. The Tao is known as the Uncarved Block, which gives rise to the ten thousand things (diversity). Taoism therefore has within it a trinitarian view of unity and diversity, at least within Abhishiktānanda's sense. The view that the Tao cannot be named also fits with Abhishiktānanda's apophaticism and his mistrust of conceptual formulations.[60]

But Abhishiktānanda himself makes only a very few references to Taoism. He includes Taoism in the "three great traditions of the world" which he says stand by the intuition of a reality beyond the *dvandvas* (dualities): the Upanishadic, the Buddhist and the Tao."[61] He makes far more references to Zen Buddhism.[62] As discussed in the thesis, he refers to the Ten Oxherding Pictures of Zen as exemplifying his idea of the return from the *nirvikalpa* experience.

Bruteau also cites Sri Ramakrishna regarding the importance of the return:

> The *jñāni* gives up his identification with worldly things, discriminating 'Not this, not this'. Only then can he realise Brahman. It is like reaching the roof of a house by leaving the steps behind, one by one. But the *Vijñāni*, who is more intimately acquainted with *Brahman*, realizes something more. He realizes that the steps are made of the same materials as the roof: bricks, lime and brick-dust. That which is realized intuitively as *Brahman*, through the eliminating process of 'not this, not this', is then found to have become the universe and all its living beings. The *Vijñāni* sees that the Reality which is Nirguna, without attributes, is also Saguna, with attributes.[63]

Ramakrishna therefore affirms the reality of the world of diversity. We must however remember that Ramakrishna himself was influenced by non-traditional sources as well as by Western

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[60] *Nonduality*, p. 115: The Tao is what there is before bifurcation into subject and object; p. 117: The uncarved block is not named; p. 274: In Taoism, both duality and nonduality are real.

[61] "The Upanishads and the Advaitic Experience", *Clergy Monthly,* Dec., 1974, p. 477.

[62] There is a link between Zen Buddhism and Taoism. See Ray Grigg: *The Tao of Zen* (Rutland, Vermont: Tuttle, 1994).

[63] Bruteau, *op. cit.*, p. 318, ft. 41, citing *The Gospel of Ramakrishna*, (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1992, first published 1942), p. 103.

influences.[64] Ramakrishna's view does show, however, that within neo-Hinduism there is an emphasis on the reality of the world.

5. Abhishiktānanda's own experience

Based on my reading of Abhishiktānanda, I conclude that he did not achieve *nirvikalpa samādhi*, if that experience is interpreted as a Pure Consciousness experience. I conclude this from Abhishiktānanda's own words. He says in 1963, "…that *aham* which Ramana had promised me, there too I got nothing for my trouble!"[65] And as late as 1973, he said that he had achieved nothing further since Arunāchala.[66] I have discussed Abhishiktānanda's experiences with his disciple Chaduc. I conclude that Chaduc may have achieved the state of Pure Consciousness, and Abhishiktānanda may have experienced it vicariously through Chaduc. But Abhishiktānanda's own experience was during his heart attack. And that experience was not one of Pure Consciousness. He continued to make distinctions, and to observe those around him, even if from a distance.

Abhishiktānanda writes about the importance of this near-death experience. He calls it a "great adventure", and compares it to the finding of the Grail. Yet he also de-emphasizes it, afraid that his own story will become too mythical. He says it was not a grand vision, but rather "a waiting, an awakening, something quite peaceful."[67] I believe that he chose to de-emphasize his experience because of his opposition of those who seek "spiritual experiences" in the form of mystical visions or auditions or trance-like states[68]. He says in *Guru* that the *advaitic* experience is not a personal experience in the sense of a particular mental state, but rather an experience of totality*:*

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[64] Halbfass says that Vivekānanda, as a follower of Ramakrishna, had been exposed to non-traditional *advaitic* sources, such as the *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha.* Wilhelm Halbfass: "Neo-Hinduism and Modern Indian Traditionalism", *India and Europe*: *An Essay in Understanding* (State University of New York Press, 1988), pp 229, 240.

[65] Diary, p. 255 (12.4.63).

[66] *Letters*, pp. 285, 286 (MC, 1.2.73).

[67] *Letters*, p. 312 (AF, 17.9.73).

[68] Preface, *Guru*, pp. Xi, xii.

> So long as only one side of human nature is affected–the intellect or the emotions, for example–we can be sure that the definitive experience is still remote.[69]

The fact that Abhishiktānanda did not achieve *nirvikalpa* does not mean that Abhishiktānanda did not achieve the *advaitic* experience. Ramaṇa himself says that the *nirvikalpa* experience is not necessary. And Abhishiktānanda's experience was like Ramaṇa's near death experience, where he had an overwhelming certainty of the continued existence of the Self. I believe that as a result of his close experiences with his disciple Chaduc, as well as during his heart attack, Abhishiktānanda attained the *sahaja* experience that Ramaṇa speaks about, and which Abhishiktānanda believed to be the goal of *advaita.* It was an experience of connectedness with reality, a state of being beyond his individual ego.

E. Being and the issue of levels of reality

In some places, Abhishiktānanda seems to speak of two levels of reality in a dualistic sense. This is due to two causes: (1) his scholastic background, which emphasizes a dualism of nature and grace and (2) the interpretations of Vedānta that tend to reify *Brahman*.

It is clear that Abhishiktānanda's scholastic background caused him a lot of difficulty in integrating his understanding of *advaita*. Initially, he interpreted *advaita* as something that could be achieved 'by nature' but which was fulfilled by the Christian revelation of the Trinity. This view was in accordance with the articles by Lacombe that he had read before coming to India. Even as he moved away from the view of Christianity as fulfillment, he continued to use scholastic distinctions such as essence/accident, being/becoming, and eternity/time. The comparisons that he makes between *Brahman* and the One of Parmenides show the persistence of Greek thinking in Abhishiktānanda–a dualism between a static form and the changing phenomena of matter.[70]

But as we have seen, Abhishiktānanda also criticizes the Greek way of thinking. He sees more and more how Christian thought is rooted in Greek. This insight seems to have been due to

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[69] Preface, *Guru*, p. xiii.

[70] See for example *Guhāja*, p. 128, where he compares the *kevala* state with the ideas of Parmenides.

his reading of Heidegger. And over time, Abhishiktānanda rejects much of the dualism from his scholasticism.

In one passage, Abhishiktānanda consciously exchanges the Greek dualism between soul and body for a dualism between Self and world, which is how he understands Vedānta at that time.[71] But to say that Vedānta has a dualism is due to a reified interpretation of *Brahman*. On this view, *Brahman* is very much like the One of Parmenides. *Brahman* is unchanging, with no parts, not moving. And *Brahman* is contrasted with the changing world of illusion. This is certainly a view supported by some interpretations of Vedānta. This view is reinforced by the doctrine that the student who wishes to take up *yoga* must first of all be able to discriminate between the real and the unreal contributes to such a two level view of reality within Hinduism.[72]

Abhishiktānanda alternates between such an unchanging view of *Brahman* and a more dynamic view of *Brahman* in accordance with the *tantric* ideas of *śakti*. Sometimes he uses the more static way of referring to the experience of *Brahman* in the *kevala* experience. At other times, using Western terminology, he speaks of a "Transcendence within Immanence." The One is to be found within the deepest part of one's self, the cave of one's heart.

As a result of his reflection on dualistic patterns in Greek thought, Abhishiktānanda also interprets his Christian doctrines in much more immanent terms. We have seen this in his rejection of the idea of the supernatural. And he also interprets the nature of Christ in truly human terms. As early as 1954, he asks, "Why want the Incarnation to be more real than the creation?"[73]

Although Abhishiktānanda uses the word 'emanation' to describe the manifestation of diversity, he is uncomfortable with the word. We have seen this in the discussion as to whether he is using the word 'Being' in an analogical or a univocal sense. Abhishiktānanda is bothered even in referring to *Brahman* as 'reality':

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[71] *Diary*, p. 246 (17.2.62). His objection to the Greek soul/body dualism is that it gives too much importance to the intellect, whereas *ātman* is the center of the whole body.

[72] *Intériorité*. p. 47 refers to the initial discrimination between real and unreal. In *Guhāntara,* Abhishiktānanda says that the discrimination, *viveka,* is only really effective at the moment of awakening.

[73] *Diary*, p. 93 (6.5.54).

> The goal is to search even beyond the category of reality/nonreality to the experience of Reality itself, which absolutely transcends every previous concept of reality, and lets appear everything that used to be classed as "real" as an analogy of that which used to be classified as "unreal."[74]

And in *Guhāja* he says,

> God is so much present in the universe that to try to distinguish him there is to cease to see him. Being is coextensive with Maya. All of eternity is in each particle of time, all of time in all of eternity. God is not a thing in the universe, not exterior to man, nor an interior thing. The universe does not form a pair with God; God is one without a Second.[75]

We see here that Abhishiktānanda denies that God is a "thing". God is not to be conceptualized using any empirical terminology. But on the other hand, Abhishiktānanda insists that "the universe does not form a pair with God."

Although Being cannot be conceptualized, Abhishiktānanda believed that it could nevertheless be experienced. The objectification or conceptualization of God can never be God. This is also the view expressed by Watts:

> The point is that Reality, God, the Eternal Now, is entirely beyond speech and understanding and attainment, but at the same time is right here. If you try to catch hold of it, you will miss it. But go straight ahead with your ordinary life, "Walk on!", wash your dishes, think your everyday thoughts, and you will see that you can't get away from it. Yet this is already too much conceptualization![76]

That is also the view of other interpreters of at least some kinds of Buddhism. The nonconceptual experience is the state of unconstructed awareness, beyond concepts. We can have a cognition of the way things really are (of "Thusness") which can only be expressed apophatically.[77] We can therefore experience Being, even if we cannot conceptualize it. This may help to explain what Heidegger means by Being. It is related that Heidegger said of D.T.

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[74] *Guhāntara*, p. 44 (unpublished).

[75] "Vers l'Un", *Guhāja*, p. 95.

[76] Alan Watts: *Behold the Spirit* (New York: Random House, 1971, originally published 1947). We know that Abhishiktānanda read this book and recommended it to Fr. Lemarié.

[77] Griffiths: "Pure Consciousness and Indian Buddhism", *The Problem of Pure Consciousness: Mysticism and Philosophy , ed. K.C. Forman,*(Oxford, 1990).p. 89.

Suzuki: "If I understand this man correctly, this is what I have been trying to say in all my writings."[78]

Although he objects to the use of empirical terms to describe God, Abhishiktānanda still makes a distinction between the Unmanifested and the manifested. Using Heidegger's terminology, there is a difference between Being and beings. There is an ontological distinction. Is this another dualism? Loy thinks that it is.[79] I believe that the answer is that although there are two different levels of reality, it is one reality. There are two different ways of viewing the same reality. *Brahman* is the nondual view; the view of diversity is the empirical view. To understand this argument, we must look at Abhishiktānanda's apophaticism, his view of "dialectics" (the overuse of logic), and the analogy of the prism.

F. Thinking and the advaitic experience

1. Apophaticism

These issues relate primarily to the discussion in Chapter VI (Thinking). Abhishiktānanda, like Monchanin, believed that the apophatic tradition of the West was a link to the Hindu *advaita*. God or *Brahman* is One, the One-without-any-Second (*ekam advitīyam*). God cannot be described in terms of anything related to creation. The One and the Many are incommensurable. That is why our experience of the One cannot be spoken of in terms of the Many; we can only be silent.

Monchanin's use of apophaticism was more nuanced than Abhishiktānanda's. As I have discussed, Monchanin argued that there are as many different types of apophaticism as there are ontologies. There are different views of self, universe and Being. [80] He says that Plotinus is

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[78] William Barrett: Introduction to anthology of Suzuki's writings, *Zen Buddhism* (New York: Doubleday, 1956), xi. Cited in *Nonduality*, p. 175.

[79] *Nonduality,* p. 321 ft. 23.

[80] "Apophatisme et Apavāda", *Jules Monchanin: Mystique de l'Inde, mystère chrétien*, ed. Suzanne Siauve (Paris: Fayard, 1974), p. 119: "L'apophaticisme se situe sur le triple plan logique, ontologique et existentiel."

more apophatic than Plato, and that Shankara's thought is more apophatic than that of Plotinus, but that Shankara's thought does not reach the Emptiness ("Vide") of the Tao.[81]

I believe that Monchanin is correct in this analysis of apophaticism. Abhishiktānanda's apophaticism begins with his scholastic dualistic distinctions, and his assumption that the One is the same as the static One of Parmenides. But over time, his apophaticism becomes more radical, ending in a Buddhist-like (or perhaps Taoist?) relativization of all views.

Panikkar also makes a distinction between types of apophaticism. He distinguishes between an epistemological apophaticism and an ontic apophaticism. Epistemological apophaticism merely says that ultimate reality is ineffable–our human intelligence cannot grasp it, even though ultimate reality may itself be supremely intelligible in itself. He contrasts this with the ontic apophaticism within Buddhism:

> Buddhistic apophaticism, on the other hand, seeks to transport this ineffability to the heart of ultimate reality itself, declaring that this reality–inasmuch as its *logos* (its expression and communication) no longer pertains to the order of ultimate realty but precisely to the manifestation of that order–is ineffable not merely in our regard, but as such, *quoad se*.[82]

In this view, ultimate reality is "so supremely ineffable and transcendent" that Buddhism denies it the very character of being. Being relates to what *is*, and what *is* is in some manner thinkable and communicable since it belongs to the order of manifestation.

This also means that when we speak of Being, we are using the word in neither an analogical nor a univocal sense. Panikkar says that the use of the word 'Being' is only as a "catalyst" that must be left behind:

> Being is a mental catalyst that enables us to place the incommensurable in relation, or indeed to speak of the ineffable at all. Once used as a category of thought, as the axis of the cylinder of the intellectual piston, it must be discarded, lest, excluded from the vital process of intellection, it congeal, and thereby become the greatest hindrance of all to what it was intended precisely to expedite.[83]

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[81] Ysabel de Andia: "Jules Monchanin, La mystique Apophatique et l'Inde", *Jules Monchanin: Regards croisés d'Occident et d'Orient* (Lyon: Profac-Credic, 1997), p. 114.

[82] Raimon Panikkar: *The Silence of God: The Answer of the Buddha* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1989), p. 14.

[83] *Ibid*., p. 42.

Panikkar says that this is the Buddhist position. It is also what he understands to be the position of Gregory of Nyssa, who uses the concept of *epextasis.* Panikkar says that *epextasis* is an implicit synthesis between a static, substantialistic vision of reality and a dynamic, temporal conception of it. Panikkar cites Nyssa: "Nothing of what the human mind can know is knowledge of God." Panikkar says that this concept has been insufficiently explored. He points out that Abhishiktānanda uses the word in *Sagesse*, but that Abhishiktānanda does not explain the word.[84] Panikkar says that many of the Church fathers were much more "Buddhistic" in their views than is commonly imagined.

2. The dualistic nature of concepts

As I have discussed in Chapter VI, Abhishiktānanda sees our conceptualization as dualistic. Our concepts are an attempt to "grasp" and re-present the experience. In reaching this view, Abhishiktānanda was undoubtedly influenced by Heidegger. Abhishiktānanda combines this rejection of *eidos* with Jung's idea of archetypes. For Abhishiktānanda, our experience is primary. Archetypes are the first expression of this experience. From these archetypes develop myths and symbols. Our concepts are dependent on archetypes, myths and symbols. In order to attain to the nondual experience, we must go beyond all concepts, myths and archetypes. This "going beyond" concepts, myths and archetypes corresponds to what I called the Yogic Model of experience in Chapter II. Once we have the experience, we cannot fully describe it, because that again involves the return to concepts. He says that if we ever experience the One of Plotinus, the Self of Yogis, the God of believers, we cannot express it, because in order to express it our consciousness must return to the surface, return by the archetypes and all that has been built up in concepts, images and words.[85]

If conceptual thinking is dualistic, is there a nondual thinking? Nondual thinking cannot arise in the Pure Consciousness state, which by definition is imageless and without thought. But in the *sahaja* state, it makes sense to speak of nondual thinking in terms of a nonconceptual,

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[84] *Ibid*., p. 221, ft. 177. He cites Abhishiktānanda's *Sagesse*, pp. 239, 245. Monchanin refers to this same saying from Gregory of Nyssa. He says that in his polemic against Arianism, Gregory exalts the incomprehensibility and unintelligibility of God. See Ysabel de Andia: "Jules Monchanin, La mystique Apophatique et l'Inde", *Jules Monchanin: Regards croisés d'Occident et d'Orient* (Lyon: Profac-Credic, 1997), p. 115.

[85] *Guhāja*, p. 97

creative, spontaneous thinking. This is similar to Heidegger's view of thinking as a kind of perception, of letting truth appear.

Abhishiktānanda believed that the symbols expressed in his poetry would go beyond the conceptual and point to the experience of Being that cannot be captured by our concepts. Abhishiktānanda does not himself refer to his poetry as nondual thinking, but a parallel can be made with Heidegger's ideas. We may also compare this with the views of J.L. Mehta. Mehta writes about the rediscovery of symbolism by Eliade, and the use of symbolism in the poetry of Aurobindo. Mehta says that language is the main instrument of our refusal to accept the world as it is.[86] I understand this to mean a refusal to accept the world as known by our concepts. The symbol is pre-conceptual and therefore closer to an unconstructed awareness. But Mehta says that Aurobindo was also a conceptual thinker, and he looks at the relation between Aurobindo's poetry and his conceptual thinking. If conceptual thinking is dualistic, is there any positive use for it?

3. A positive valuation of concepts

Abhishiktānanda says that our concepts are dualistic, and grasping. But he also says that after the *advaitic* experience, we must return to the world of *nāmarūpa*, and again use concepts. Concepts are necessary, but we must recognize their relativity. He says that after the *advaitic* experience, which is a radical deliverance from out attempts to think, we later have to be able to recognize the value of the *nāmarūpa*. We find ourselves once more Christian, Hindu, Buddhist.[87] Does Abhishiktānanda give any rationale for why concepts or theory might be positive, provided that one is aware of the dangers of reductionism and of the relativity of thought?

Both the views of Abhishiktānanda and Loy give the impression that our concepts are a necessary evil. They therefore give the impression that nonduality is not only a non-rationalism (in rejecting the dualism of concepts), but of an irrationalism, a rejection of all conceptual

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[86] J.L. Mehta refers to Aurobindo's use of poetic creativity. Mehta cites Rudolf Steiner: "Language is the main instrument of man's refusal to accept the world as it is." "Sri Aurobindo: Life, Language, Yoga", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, ed. William J. Jackson, (New York: Brill, 1992), p. 155.

[87] *Letters*, p. 284 (MC, 26.1.73).

thinking for all purposes. Abhishiktānanda says for example that concepts are a necessary part of living as a *jīvanmukti* in the world of distinction. After appearing again from the *advaitic* experience and from the "naked truth of the Absolute", one must again accept the forms and names to which we are "attached so cruelly but which for us nevertheless hold no attraction."[88]

Loy says that when we see the world as divided this is the empirical world and when we see the world as a unity, this is Advaita. He says that the nondual and the empirical are the "two truths" of Buddhism. According to Loy, the challenge for philosophy is to show the relation between the two truths. There must be some relation between the two truths, or liberation would not be possible, because we could never make the transition (or "leap") from delusion to enlightenment.[89]

Loy says that Mādhyamika and Yogācāra demonstrate self-contradictory nature of our usual phenomenal world, including the *pramāṇas* (modes of knowledge). Mādhyamika and Yogācāra devalue dualistic experience and pave the way for the nondual experience. Our concepts may be "skillful means" to bring us to the *advaitic* realization. He contrasts this with the view of Shankara, who did not challenge the validity of the *pramāṇas*, but merely limited their application to the empirical world. When we reach the knowledge of *Brahman,* the *pramāṇas* lose their authority. Loy says that Shankara was able to do this because of his reliance on the Vedic revelation of *Brahman*[90] Without that Vedic revelation, the Buddhist philosophers had to analyze the relation between the two levels, logically refuting the lower for the sake of experiencing the higher.

Loy therefore opts for what he sees as the Buddhist solution. The *pramānas* are devalued. In my view, Loy cannot give any rationale for why conceptual activity should be valued. But is Loy correct in saying that Shankara's solution assumes the necessity of revelation? In my view, Neo-Hinduism and Abhishiktānanda are correct that this revelation is itself the result of an intuition of Being. Just because it cannot be conceptualized does not mean it cannot be experienced.

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[88] "Dans Le Centre Le Plus Profond", *Guhāntara* (unpublished)

[89] *Ibid*. p. 69.

[90] *Nonduality*, p. 63.

There are some indications that Abhishiktānanda believed that there is value in concepts, once they are relativized:

> Advaitin experience is a new consciousness, a new level of consciousness in which all ideas are seen as if for the first time.[91]

If ideas are seen as if for the first time, then presumably there is value in these ideas. And as we shall see in the Appendix, he speaks of "swallowing" the experience in order to attain to a higher degree of consciousness. He says that our intuition must be 'conceived' or absorbed if it is to penetrate in full force all the levels of being.[92] This idea of the valid use of concepts needs to be more developed in Abhishiktānanda, especially since he himself devoted so much of his life to attempting to express the experience in conceptual form.[93] If, as Abhishiktānanda says, our myths and archetypes are inevitable, but then sometimes need to be reformulated, does that not point to a positive use of concepts within the disciplines of theology and philosophy? He himself refers to the need for

> An Indian theology, freed from thinker [*mantā*] and doer [*kartā*] from thought [*noêma*] and action [*poiêma*]. A theology of becoming oneself. The Trinity: becoming oneself in reciprocal relationship [*paraspara*].[94]

We can gain some insight into what such a valid use of concepts might look like in examining his view of "dialectics", or the wrong use of logic. If there is a wrong use of logic, that might imply the correct use, provided that we relativize our concepts.

4. Rejection of logicism

a) Dialectics

Abhishiktānanda says that the followers of Shankara had a monistic view of the identity of *ātman* and *Brahman* due to their "dialectics." It seems to me that Abhishiktānanda obtained

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[91] Diary p. 326 (20.5.71).

[92] "The Upanishads, an Introduction", *Further Shore*, p. 97.

[93] In my opinion, a nondual reading of the ideas of Herman Dooyeweerd: *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1969). (*op. cit.*) would provide a helpful start to showing how theory can be used positively while not denying a nondual reality. He contrasts our concept-forming activity with our everyday activity where we see reality in its interconnectedness and wholeness. A development of this idea is beyond the scope of this thesis.

[94] *Diary*, p. 333 (20.9.71).

this view from his readings of Rudolf Otto and Alan Watts. Otto says that there is a tendency to create a language and dogma of rigid formulas and that:

> The school of Śankara afterwards retained and exaggerated this tendency, and became rationalistic and dialectic. It confines the unspeakable within such closes limits, forces the non-rational into such stiff formulas, and develops such stereotyped and unyielding technical language, that feeling is almost crushed out; the glimmer of the mystery almost disappears, and a hair-splitting dialectical system replaces the deeply significant language of the mysteries of the Upanishad-tradition.[95]

Otto refers to the saying (*mahavakya*) "Brahma is this *ātman*". He says that the use of the copula here is not to be interpreted as logical identity:

> The last sentence is of course not of a logical, but of a mystical nature. The word "is" in the mystical formula of identification has a significance which it does not contain in logic. It is no copula as in the sentence: S is P; it is no sign of equality in a reversible equation. It is not the "is" of a normal assertion of identity. However much the emphatic pronouncements of Śankara and Eckhart strive to attain to the latter, they do not succeed in hiding the fact that their logic is indeed the "wonder" logic of mysticism.[96]

In *Ermites*, Monchanin says something similar in his comments about the logic of *advaita*. He says that *advaita* is a challenge (*défi*) to all thought, even to the principle of identity, and a challenge to all experience, even that of the One.[97] Abhishiktānanda would have been aware of this remark by Monchanin.

Abhishiktānanda may also have obtained his view of the overuse of logic from Watts. In *Behold the Spirit*, Watts says,

> Our logic, our method of reasoning is entirely dualistic, and therefore cannot without contradictions treat of a Being who surpasses duality. The unity of God is therefore seen as *opposed* to multiplicity in God. God has no opposite, and yet we apply to him the term unity in a sense which has an opposite, for unity as we conceive it is unthinkable without the contrast of multiplicity. […] Our difficulty is that, while admitting the non-duality of God, we apply terms to him in a

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[95] Rudolf Otto: *Mysticism East and West* (Macmillan, 1970 first published 1932), p. 49, ft. 4.

[96] *Ibid.*, p. 194.

[97] "Note D: *Māyā*", *Ermites*.

> dualistic sense. We speak of him rightly as one, but then go on to reason from the term as if it were to be used in an exclusive and privative sense.[98]

Watts says that terms of privation should be used to show God's freedom from limitation. But to use the word 'one' in a dualistic sense does not do this; it confines God within a dualistic conception of the One and the Many. "The very concept of one-ness is a term of duality, because it is inconceivable apart from the idea of two, or of many, or even of none."

Abhishiktānanda makes a similar statement about not referring to God as simply one, since this would be a conceptual and dualistic interpretation of God:

> [The *jñāni*] will not say that the I, the world and God are simply one, any more than he will reduce being to a philosophical monad. "This would exceed the limits of his insight, and moreover would be a conceptual–and so dualistic–interpretation of that which transcends all conceptualization. All that he can allow himself to murmur is that 'there is not two', *a-dvaita,* since being cannot be divided.[99]

Abhishiktānanda says elsewhere that even referring to 'monotheism' is a measuring of God by our own human scale at the very moment when we proclaim God to be beyond all measurement.[100]

Watts says that the phrase 'One-without-a-second" (*ekam advitīyam*) is to be seen in this sense of God's freedom from limitation–that nothing can set any boundaries to God's being and power. The phrase *ekam advitīyam* is not to be interpreted in a monistic sense.

> For if the unity of God is truly all-inclusive and non-dual, it must include diversity and distinction as well as one-ness; otherwise the principle of diversity would stand over against God as something opposite to and outside him.[101]

The rejection of "dialectics" by Abhishiktānanda is therefore tied into a view of reality that allows reality to both the One and the Many. His rejection of this dialectics or logicism is not a rejection of faulty reasoning, or the drawing of wrong conclusions. It is rather the application of logic in an "area" where it does not belong: the area of Being. Watts thinks that

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[98] Alan Watts: *Behold the Spirit* (New York: Random House, 1971, first published 1947), p. 139.

[99] *Saccidānanda,* p. 44.

[100] *Saccidānanda*, p. 45. .See also *Saccidānanda*, p. 88, ft.1: The mystery of being transcends all numeration as it does all thought.

[101] Alan Watts: *Behold the Spirit* (New York: Random House, 1971, first published 1947), p. 141.

Shankara avoids the dualistic use of logic. Abhishiktānanda on the other hand sees in Shankara (or at least in his disciples) a rigidity of logic that refers to *Brahman* as One in a sense that opposes One to multiplicity. In other words, applying our dualistic logic to *Brahman* results in a monistic conception. But the trinitarian "revelation" solves this problem that our human logic has reached:

> The reality of the creature would be really inconceivable without the revelation of the trinitarian mystery, which clears away the impasse in which we have become enclosed with our too human logic, still too dualistic, the *advaita* of Shankara.[102]

The *advaita* of Shankara, in holding to the logical identity of God and world, is too dualistic, because it applies dualistic logic to Being that is beyond logic.

b) The analogy of the Prism

Abhishiktānanda's idea of the avoidance of dialectics or logicism is not a proof of the non-monistic nature of *advaita*. The idea of this kind of misuse of logic itself assumes that reality has both unity and diversity. But although it is not a proof, it shows how logic ought to be used by those who know this "trinitarian" nature of reality. The cosmic diversity of the world is not the same as the distinctions and identities that we make in logic.

This distinction between cosmic diversity and logical distinction does not seem to be recognized by Loy. That is why his acceptance of Nāgārjuna's dialectics leads him to a denial of individuality and plurality. I think that the distinction between cosmic diversity and logical distinction can also explain why Abhishiktānanda can say that there are still distinctions in the nondual state, even if dualisms are overcome:

> The I as witness…simply TO BE, without reflecting on the subject as be-ing. Perceive beings beyond the distinction between myself/not-myself, but do not deny this distinction by means of an idea.[103]

The difference between cosmic diversity and logical distinction is sometimes explained by the analogy of the prism. By virtue of a prism, white light breaks up into many different colours. There is a nonduality between the one white light and the many colours. But the one

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[102] *Guhāja*, p. 119 (my translation).

[103] *Diary*, p. 312, (16.4.69).

white light cannot be explained by of reduced to one of the colours. Similarly, the One cannot be reduced to the distinctions of logic. Logic is a part of empirical reality and can never explain the nature of undivided reality.[104]

This analogy of the prism is very old. Rudolf Otto cites Eckhart's use of this analogy, where space and time are the prism that break the One into the manifold nature of the world:

> In space and time the One cannot also be the other; objects fall into distinction. Let me however conceive them without this dispersing prism, then should I see them in their identity.[105]

Otto applies this analogy of the prism to *advaita Vedānta*, where *avidyā* is the prism*:*

> As the one homogeneous, white light, seen through a prism, breaks up into seven colors, and as the basis of the existence of the seven colors is not the prism alone, but is chiefly the white light and its own nature, so, in the prism of the Avidyā the one "only Being" breaks itself up into Iśvara with soul and world. But the reason that it breaks, and must so break, lies unquestionably in "Being" itself." Brahman is the great *Māyin,* the Magician who "deludes" the man without knowledge; the magician is the reason for the world's appearance in its present form to the person without insight.[106]

Otto also refers to Fichte's use of this analogy. He cites Fichte's view that it is our concepts that break up reality:

> Just as your physical eye is a *prism*, in which the ether, which is homogeneous, pure and colorless, breaks on the surfaces of things into manifold colors, so it is in the things of the spiritual world. […] We see Him (through the eye of conception) as stone, plant, animal; we see Him when we pass beyond these, as the law of nature, as the moral law. Yet all this is still not He. Always the form hides the Being from us. Always our seeing itself covers up the object of our seeing, and our own eye stands in the way of our sight.[107]

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[104] Dooyeweerd has extended this analogy of the prism one step further. The one white light cannot be reduced to an individual colour. But neither can any individual colour be reduced to another colour. Logic cannot be reduced to mathematics. There are analogies between various aspects of our life, but each aspect cannot reduced to the other. Herman Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Critical Thought* (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1969). Dooyeweerd cautions that the analogy of the prism ought not to be taken in a literal sense, since that would imply the notion of substance, which he rejects.

[105] Rudolf Otto: *Mysticism East and West* (Macmillan, 1970 first published 1932), p. 83.

[106] *Ibid.*, p. 129.

[107] *Ibid.*, p. 245.

Otto compares this eye of conception with the doctrine of superimposition in Shankara. We only see God through the prism of concepts.

Monchanin was aware of the analogy of the prism. He refers to "le prisme de non-être" in relation to Shankara's ideas. He interprets Shankara's ideas as the manifestation of substance in its accidents.[108] He does not say so, but the implication is that substance is Being, which manifests in its accidents through the process of becoming, which he understands as non-Being.

The analogy of the prism is not specifically used by Abhishiktānanda, but it does help to explain what he means by the improper use of dialectic. The true nature of reality is of a different order than that of our conceptions. In my opinion, that there are two orders of levels does not mean that there is a dualism. The white light and the spectrum of colours are nondual to each other, but exist on different levels. Abhishiktānanda says that we must become an awakened one, a Buddha, and in this awakening itself discover that it is an order of reality just as irreducible to our conceptions as the state of waking is to the state of dream.[109]

In this discussion of apophaticism (especially as interpreted by Panikkar), the analogy of the prism, and the misuse of logic, I believe that a basis has been established to understand what Abhishiktānanda may mean when he speaks of the necessity of Transcendence while at the same time rejecting a dualism. All of these ideas rely on the idea of cosmic diversity being manifested from the "One" [or *Brahman*, or the Tao, or *Śūnyatā*]. This is Abhishiktānanda's trinitarianism, which as he has argued, is not unique to Christianity.

G. Acosmism and ethics

Abhishiktānanda has two conflicting principles relating to nondual action. The first principle is that it is unnecessary to do anything. This is related to the state of *nirvikalpa samādhi* or Pure Consciousness. Abhishiktānanda emphasizes the importance of just being in this state. Attaining this nondual state is the highest achievement. The monk or nun in his or her solitude contributes more to the world than all the activism of those who wish to improve the

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[108] "Note D: *Māyā",* Ermites.

[109] *Guhāntara*, p. 44 (unpublished excerpt).

world. The only justification given by Abhishiktānanda for this view is the idea that we are a microcosm, and that in finding the Self we also help the world as macrocosm.

The other principle for Abhishiktānanda's ethics is that of seeing the Self in the world–in others and in nature. This is something that occurs in the *sahaja* state of the *jīvanmukti*. The basis for all of our ethics towards others is this realization that these 'others' share the same Self. For Abhishiktānanda, ethics continue to be important even in the state of liberation. Nondual actions will be spontaneous, without ego and without attachment.[110] Abhishiktānanda says of this view that only the *advaitin* totally enjoys these words of Genesis: and all things were perfectly good.[111] Abhishiktānanda is not aware that this *tat tvam asi* basis for ethics is only a recent development in Hinduism, and that it largely derives from Western ideas, and Schopenhauer in particular.[112] It is true that some yoga texts like the *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha* and the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* express ideas of compassion, but these can probably be traced to Buddhist influences. Other ideas of the *jīvanmukti* "doing good" in the world derive from Western influences that have since been adopted by neo-Hinduism.[113]

I have discussed the problem as to whether or not a *jīvanmukti* will always act without ego. In *Guru*, Abhishiktānanda says that the *jñāni* "always acts well" because all egoism, which is the source of sin, has disappeared. It is true that Christians have spoken of Christ as one without sin, but the Church has long struggled with the problem of whether or not Christians are to attain the standard of perfectionism. Yet that is exactly what these writings of Abhishiktānanda would seem to say. Abhishiktānanda says,

> The *jñāni* will do whatever his companions and colleagues do–only he will do it perfectly. Freed from then limitations of human selfishness and anxiety, in all that he does he will be in a pre-eminent way the instrument of the spirit. He will have a marvellous detachment from everything, because, if the Absolute is

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[110] I have referred to Bruteau's Taoist interpretation of these ethics. However, as also mentioned, Abhishiktānanda continued to believe that Christian ethics would apply.

[111] *Guhāja*, p. 61

[112] As discussed, Vivekānanda relied on Deussen who got the idea from Schopenhauer. But even Schopenhauer was inspired by the Upanishads. He may have reinterpreted the Upanishads to give them this ethical twist. But this is a good example of change within religions–a change occurred in both Western ideas and in Eastern ways of viewing ethics.

[113] See Andrew O. Fort: *Jīvanmukti in Transformation* (State University of New York, 1998)., p. 13.

> present in everything that happens, equally it is not limited to any one thing. If his vocation leads him to the service of his brothers, for example, the poor, the lepers, or the underprivileged, he will give himself completely to each one of them, totally forgetful of himself; for in each of these needy and unfortunate people he discerns the whole mystery of the Presence.[114]

This is what Abhishiktānanda calls "true acosmism", or "the acosmism of the Gospel." I believe that Abhishiktānanda is reinterpreting acosmism and the *sahaja* state awareness in terms of the *tat tvam asi* principle of ethics.

But will the enlightened person always act in a good way? I have discussed Barnard's solution of a spectrum of ethics. Wilber has suggested that even an enlightened person like Ramaṇa might be deficient in his ethics, requiring further integration. But how do we determine the adequacy of someone's integration? In Abhishiktānanda's view, we cannot appeal to an authority such as Scripture, since Scriptures are also based on experience. At this stage, my answer would be the pragmatic one of James: we look at the moral effects of the action over the long term. And the criterion to judge the effects is that of love, as Zaehner has emphasized.[115] Whether or not this is itself a Western standard is an issue beyond the scope of this thesis. The fact that neo-Hinduism has adopted the *tat tvam asi* principle of ethics as enunciated by Schopenhauer and Deussen is a sign of convergence of thinking in terms of ethics.

Most of Abhishiktānanda's writings concern the principle of acosmism. In my view, he overemphasizes the importance of monasticism and acosmism. In monasticism, one flees the diversity of the world in order to seek the unity of the One. This was Abhishiktānanda's motivation in coming to India. In his letter to Bishop of Trichy, Abhishiktānanda speaks of wanting to live in some hermitage, to lead the contemplative life, in the absolute simplicity of early Christian monasticism and at the same time in the closest possible conformity with the traditions of Indian *sannyāsa*. He writes to a fellow monk, Lemarié:

> …all that matters in monastic life is the help it affords for entering within. All the rest (…) is simply *māyā*! And yet, so long as we are in this world and in this *māyā* -body, we have to play the game, I to plant banana trees, translate my

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[114] *Meeting Point*, p. 64.

[115] R.C. Zaehner: *Mysticism Sacred and Profane (*Oxford: Clarendon, 1957, reprinted 1973).

> booklet, prepare accommodation for those who will join us, you to make polish here, liturgies there…[116]

The asceticism of the monk is an attempt at de-creation of the diversity of creation. It is an attempt to step back to the essential aloneness by stripping oneself of everything but one's true self. As Abhishiktānanda says in *Guhāja*, the solitude of the monk takes him away from the things of the world, and even from the things of nature. . It takes the monk away from the senses, the imagination, and thoughts.[117] Monasticism may assist in breaking the hold that our ego has on us. But not even Abhishiktānanda believed that acosmism should be a permanent condition. There is a return. And in the return ethics continue to play a role. But Abhishiktānanda does not outline what a trans-*advaitic* ethics would look like, except in very general terms, such as the importance of community and the lack of personal ego. His ideas of love and communion (*koinonia*) have their roots in his Christian trinitarian framework. This allows him to see both a commonality with others and a difference from them; this difference allows the *relationship* of love.

In *Further Shore*, based on the last articles he wrote, Abhishiktānanda says "The *saṁnyāsi* is essentially acosmic, just as were the original Christian monks."[118] Abhishiktānanda's emphasis on acosmism continued even after his heart attack. He says that Chaduc (who took a very acosmic view[119]) was the only one who had really understood him. This emphasis on acosmism is in contrast to the dreams he had just after his heart attack, which he interpreted as saying he need not continually test himself by asceticism. Even after his heart attack, Abhishiktānanda writes,

> I am so much fed up with all those swamis who are convinced that they have a 'chosen' mission, whereas the true mission of a swami is to sit in his cave till the angel takes him by the hair of his head like Habakkuk.[120]

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[116] *Letters*, p. 64 (L. 29.4.53).

[117] "Prière et Silence", *Guhāja*, pp. 2, 9.

[118] *Further Shore*, p. 13.

[119] I believe that Panikkar is correct here. Panikkar: "A Letter to Abhishiktānanda", p. 448: Chaduc caused Abhishiktānanda to revert to the "fervour" of the acosmic monk; he reawakened in him his almost vanished dream of pure *saṁnyāsin* according to the strictest standards.

[120] *Letters*, p. 310 (MR, 2.9.73).

Habakkuk was a Biblical prophet, who received a vision to speak to the people that they should be loyal to God. In the apocryphal story of Bel and the Dragon, mention is made of Habakkuk the prophet in the land of Judah, who was carried from there by an angel to Babylon, to feed Daniel in the den. Abhishiktānanda's reference to Habakkuk's action is therefore a hint that Abhishiktānanda's emphasis on acosmism is not absolute, and that the swami can be asked to be a prophet, or to perform some action. Despite this hint of ethical action, I conclude that even after his *advaitic* experience, Abhishiktānanda continued to experience the conflict between an acosmic view of ethics and the view of a communitarian ethic of love in the *sahaja* state.

H. The relativizing of Religion

1. Religions are different views

As we have seen in Chapter IX, Abhishiktānanda relativizes all religious doctrines. Abhishiktānanda uses the terminology of Vedanta, *nāmarūpa* to describe the limitations that all religions impose on the Absolute.[121] The different religions are all only views of reality. . "The awakened are only different from one another in relation to the dream from which they awake."[122] It was Abhishiktānanda's view that religions change over time, even if the basic experience that is expressed in these religions does not change.

> The Upanishadic experience is neither exotic nor esoteric. It is not exotic, because it is absolutely universal. The forms in which it is interpreted, the mental, linguistic, cultural, and even the religious, context in which it occurs, may vary to an infinite extent.[123]

Abhishiktānanda says that those who are so entirely certain of their beliefs–the speculative *advaitins* and the people of faith (Christians and others) "seem to be deluding themselves terribly." They do not regard their opinions as opinions (*doxa*), but hold on to them in an *a priori* fashion out of insecurity.[124]

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[121] Bettina Bäumer, Occasional Bulletin of the Abhishiktānanda Society, p. 19.

[122] *Diary*, p. 326 (1.4.71).

[123] "The Upanishads: An Introduction", *Further Shore*, p. 108.

[124] *Diary*, p. 294 (5.3.67).

Abhishiktānanda says that he learned the relative character of the Scriptures and Christian dogma from Monchanin.[125] But the process of relativization was actually much earlier for Abhishiktānanda. He says that ever since his youth he was envious of those who did not believe or who had been educated beyond belief. This envy was transferred to saints of Vedānta and to Ramana.

> I envied their *autonomy*, in the noblest sense of the word. It seemed to me that they possessed something of which I was ignorant and which I did not have.[126]

But the main influence for Abhishiktānanda's extreme apophaticism is Harilal. Harilal urged him to go beyond his Christianity, and to leave behind all rites and beliefs. At the time, Abhishiktānanda thought that this was the most radical *advaita* he had heard. But it continued to influence him. When Robert Vachon met Abhishiktānanda in 1970, Abhishiktānanda told him how important Harilal had been for him.[127]

Chaduc also influenced Abhishiktānanda to relativize his ideas. When Abhishiktānanda made the comment that there was no abyss between *Brahman* and himself, Chaduc said that it is even an illusion to say that there is no abyss. This caused Abhishiktānanda to be "panic-stricken".[128] It would seem from this brief remark that Chaduc's relativizing of doctrines was to relegate them to the realm of illusion. This would correspond with Chaduc's strong acosmism.

In some ways, Abhishiktānanda's radical apophaticism is similar to Nāgārjuna's relativizing of all views.[129] I believe however that there is a difference and that Abhishiktānanda would regard Nāgārjuna's use of logic as going too far in not only denying all dualisms but all cosmic distinctions.

Another parallel with Abhishiktānanda's thought may be found in Jainism. We have seen how Abhishiktānanda believes that Reality is both *advaita* (non-dual) and *aneka* (not-one). Jainism emphasizes both the unitary and the *aneka* character of reality. Because of this, reality is many-sided, and none of our statements can be regarded as absolute.

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[125] *Diary p. 138* (12.1.56).

[126] *Diary*, pp. 327, 328 (2.7.71).

[127] Monchanin-Information Mars-Avril 71, Vol. IV, Cahier No. 29, No. 2.

[128] Diary p. 350 (11.5.72).

Trapnell (who has also written about Abhishiktānanda) has written about this doctrine of *anekantavada* in Jainism. He suggests that this doctrine is a ground for religious pluralism:

> The metaphysical claim within the doctrine of many-sidedness is that any reality itself has many (an-eka, "not one") aspects or expresses itself in manifold forms. In its wholeness, any reality is the coexistence of contradictory elements, such as eternity and transience, or unity and multiplicity. Thus, reality itself, not just truth, is many-sided, preventing any absolute predication. The most that our perception and language can convey is a partial reality; to assume that one particular point of view, including a religious one, is final is indeed to hold as absolute a limited picture of the real.[130]

This same argument can help to explain Abhishiktānanda's relativizing of all religious statements. In the realm of the many, or of *nāmarūpa*, there are ideas that are mutually contradictory and that cannot be resolved, although these ideas may each be partially true in themselves. This is why Abhishiktānanda says that all we can do is to hold differing viewpoints in tension with each other:

> The tension between Vedanta and Christianity is insoluble…Above all because we try to judge experiences conceptually, from outside. 'Who is asking the question?' Ramana would say. The danger of everything 'mystical; is that we enjoy it, delight in it, however little our spirit is attuned to this 'beyond mind'[131]
>
> In *Sagesse* I attempted a meditative approach within the framework of classical theology. The last chapter shows that the problem is unresolved. The best course is still, I think, to hold on under extreme tension to these two forms of a unique 'faith' until the dawn appears. For *advaita* and theology are on two levels.[132]

For Abhishiktānanda, this tension was only resolved experientially, when he saw Chaduc have his experience in 1972, and when Abhishiktānanda had his own *advaitic* experience at the time of his heart attack.

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[129] See N*onduality*, p. 251: Nāgārjuna took all proposed candidates for Reality and demonstrated their relativity.

[130] Judson Trapnell: "Anekantavada or the Doctrine of Many-Sidedness*", Journal of Ecumenical Studies,* Vol. 35 No. 2 Spring.1998, online at http://pears2.lib.ohio-state.edu/FULLTEXT/JR-ADM/judson.htm.

[131] *Letters*, 209 (OB, 23.1.69).

[132] *Letters*, p. 239 (OB, 5.12.70).

2. The Challenge for Christianity

Abhishiktānanda's intended audience for his books was other Christians.[133] His ideas represent a tremendous challenge for traditional Christianity. Abhishiktānanda reinterprets almost every doctrine: the nature of Christ, the uniqueness of Christ, sin, salvation, divinity, resurrection, and even whether we can justify a belief in theism. All doctrines are relativized in favour of immediate experience. Even the names 'Father', 'Son' and 'Spirit' are only images to aid us to reach the real Abhishiktānanda also views the Scriptures as a record of experience. Abhishiktānanda says that the problem with the Christian Church is that it tries to objectify and to essentialize salvation whereas salvation is in fact an existential decision. [134] But if salvation is purely an existential decision, then what is there left for the Church to do? As an institution, there is nothing it can do which is not at the level of myths. Abhishiktānanda says that the revolution brought by Jesus was immediately defused from the very first Christian generation.[135] He says that Christianity lost its mystery and its power when it became a religion.[136] Doctrines were developed in order to shield people from the force of the immediate experience. .[137]: The formulas of the Church councils are an attempt to absolutize.[138]

Abhishiktānanda remained a Benedictine all his life, and continued to say Mass almost every day. But he also says that his attachment was to a monastic ideal "which is scarcely Benedictine and even goes beyond what could be realized within Christianity. An acosmic ideal." He says in the same letter that remaining a Benedictine was convenient. It gave him a foothold, a label, and the possibility of shelter in case of disability.[139] Abhishiktānanda wondered whether this desire for security was standing in the way of his life as a *sannyāsī.*

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[133] *Letters*, p. 180 (RP 18.5.66).

[134] *Diary*, p. 273 (12.5.64).

[135] *Diary*, p. 307 (2.11.69).

[136] *Diary*, p. 367 (2.1.73).

[137] In "Dans Le Centre Le Plus Profond", *Guhāntara* (unpublished).

[138] "Théologoumenon Upasana (méditation) sur la Trinité", *Intériorité*, p. 221.

[139] *Letters*, p. 234 (TL, 26.7.70).

Some Christians will reject Abhishiktānanda's ideas as just too radical. Others have already begun to use these ideas in order to develop a deeper spirituality.[140]

In India Abhishiktānanda's ideas represent a special challenge. Many Christian converts in India come from low caste (*Dalit*) groups. Some *Dalit* theology has objected to the use of Vedāntic ideas in Christian theology. They see this as elitist, and as a "Brahminization" of Christianity.[141] *Dalit* theology tends towards the theology of liberation. Michael Amaladoss writes that *Dalit* theology moves away from the privileging of contemplation over action, and of reason over emotion.[142]

This criticism by *Dalit* theology is certainly valid insofar as the *kevala* experience is emphasized in preference to the *sahaja* experience. Abhishiktānanda believed that what was missing in the society of his day was the Christian *sannyāsī*, and that is where he put his emphasis. But an acosmic experience does not really have anything to say to the dispossessed except that they are somehow included in the *sannyāsī's* own liberation. Abhishiktānanda was inconsistent as to where he thought the emphasis should lie. He did not always emphasize a strict acosmism, but he also refers to the *koinonia* at the very heart of Being. He says that the Church ought to be characterized by the same love. Unfortunately, he did not work out the practical implications of this in reference to India's caste system or to the poor. On the other hand, I believe that it would be a mistake for *Dalit* theology to completely disregard Abhishiktānanda's call for the experience of unity.

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[140] See for example Raimon Panikkar: "Mysticism of Jesus the Christ" *Mysticism in Shaivism and Christianity*, ed. Bettina Bäumer *Christianity* (Delhi: D.K. Printworld, 1997).; M. Thomas Thankgaraj: *The Crucified Guru* (Abingdon, 1984); Sara Grant: *Towards an Alternative Theology: Confessions of a non-dualist Christian* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1991); Wayne Teasdale: *The Mystic Heart: Discovering a Universal Spirituality in the World's Religions* (New World Library, 1999); K.P. Aleaz: *Christian Thought Through Advaita Vedānta* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1996). Two books that does not mention Abhishiktānanda but contains some similar ideas is Andrew Harvey: *Son of Man: The Mystical Path to Christ* (Tarcher, 1999) and Jim Marion: *Putting on the Mind of Christ* (Charlotteville: Hampton Roads, 2000).

[141] See the references to *Dalit* theology in K.P. Aleaz: *Christian Thought through Advaita Vedānta* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1996), p. 6, ft. 27.

[142] Michael Amaladoss: "Le Projet Théologique", *Jules Monchanin: Regards croisés d'Occident et d'Orient* (Lyon: Profac-Credic, 1997), p. 294.

3. The Challenge for Hinduism

Some of Abhishiktānanda's ideas are also common to neo-Hinduism. These commonalities include the idea that Scriptures are a record of experience, the *advaitic* source of ethics in *tat tvam asi*, and the evolution of the world towards a goal. As Hacker and Halbfass have shown, many of these ideas are probably more Western than Hindu. Traditional Hinduism still has difficulty accepting them.

Both neo-Hinduism and traditional Hinduism will have difficulty accepting Abhishiktānanda's radical relativizing of all religion, including the ideas of Vedānta and of *advaita* itself:

> Just as we cannot confuse the fundamental experience or *anubhava* with any psychic state whatsoever, we also cannot confuse it nor with any of its formulations, even the Vedāntic formulation "Non-duality" itself is only an expression, limited like every expression of the ineffable.[143]

Hinduism today tends to regard itself as inclusive of all other religions. Abhishiktānanda questioning of and relativization of its own beliefs would cause surprise and probably dismay. Abhishiktānanda says that he prefers Hindu thought to Western thought but only because Hindu thought has a built in tendency to go beyond itself. He specifically says that the ideas of Shankara are not definitive:

> The advaita of Gaudapada and Shankara is not the definitive solution; nevertheless, it is an absolutely unique plunge into the mystery of being which should be integrated by universal human thought and by Christians. The drastic negation of all duality in God and therefore in the world of being, of the real, cannot be opposed. It is the concept of duality itself which must be reconsidered.[144]

Abhishiktānanda's methodology of returning to the first Upanishads and his criticism of later developments in Vedānta as an over-use of logic would likely be regarded as a Western approach to the history of religion. Even Westerners like Hacker have criticized the objective exegesis of texts by Westerners. Hacker has criticized the view that texts must always be read in and of themselves, without reference to subsequent developments. He calls this the "positivist obsession" with the original version and earlier stages; rather, legends and myths remain

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[143] "Appel à l'intériorité", *Intériorité*, pp. 163, 164 (my translation).

[144] *Guhāja*, p. 117 (my translation).

meaningful throughout their historical changes later versions deserve as much attention as the earlier the positivist emphasis on finding the original texts.[145]

In contrast to Abhishiktānanda's insistence to return to the original texts, Hindu commentators are far more likely to try to see continuity within the tradition. The conclusions of this thesis are even less likely to be accepted, since they look at the development in religious thought. For example, my effort to probe behind the story of Ramaṇa's enlightenment is itself a very Western approach. So is my analysis of which of his views are found in traditional Vedānta and which derive more from *tantric* sources. Ramaṇa's own words emphasize the importance of the *sahaja* experience of the *jīvanmukti* over any trance experience, and this has not been sufficiently explored by his devotees. Another issue that needs to be addressed is whether Ramaṇa's view of the *sahaja* experience provides a sufficient base for ethical action. Should a *jīvanmukti* attempt to take any ethical action in the world, or is the *jīvanmukti* beyond all ethical rules? It is true that some modern Hindus speak of the *jīvanmukti* as doing good in the world, as opposed to the *prārabdha karma* view of the *jīvanmukti's* continued existence. But as Fort has argued, this idea of doing good is recent and of Western origin.

In his life, Abhishiktānanda's struggled with one of the main problems discussed in Hinduism: whether the world should be considered as illusion, or whether it has some reality, as is asserted by *tantra* and Kashmir *Śaivism*. Abhishiktānanda's trinitarianism would favour the view of the reality of the world. His finding of a similar trinitarianism within Hinduism is certainly a challenge to the more dogmatic views of Vedānta. The likely response to this challenge will be that Hinduism has known all along of differing points of view, or *darshanas*, and that they are all paths to the Truth. Some *darshanas* have always asserted the reality of the world. Others speak of *māyā* as illusion. But this type of response–that the reality of the world is the view of some *darshanas*–though it sounds inclusive and tolerant, would miss the point of Abhishiktānanda's challenge. For Abhishiktānanda was concerned with the nondual tradition of Vedānta. How has its interpretation changed over the years, and how has it been influenced by

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[145] Wilhelm Halbfass, Introduction to *Philology and Confrontation* (State University of New York, 1995), pp. 5, 17. J.L. Mehta also speaks of this Western objective exegesis. He says that in the West we search for what a text "really" means, without asking what is involved in this notion of "really." "The Hindu Tradition: The Vedic Root", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition* (New York: Brill, 1992), p. 115.

outside sources? Carrying Abhishiktānanda's ideas a bit further, we can ask, was Ramaṇa really a follower of the *Advaita* Vedānta when we know he was strongly influenced by other traditions? What difference does it make for those who wish to follow his example? I believe that these questions are important in any continuing dialogue between Hinduism and the West.

4. The Challenge to Buddhism

Abhishiktānanda's ideas have many similarities to Buddhism. The most important of these is the sense of inter-relatedness that he says occurs in the *sahaja* experience. I have compared this to the Hua Yen story of Indra's Net. If everything is inter-related, then nothing has its own self-contained existence. This is how I understand Abhishiktānanda's references to going beyond egoism, since egoism is the effort to be self-contained.[146] The inter-relatedness of Indra's Net also ties in very nicely with Abhishiktānanda's *tat tvam asi* ethic of seeing ourselves in the other.

I have also discussed how Abhishiktānanda's view of inter-relatedness does not undermine his idea of a teleology. In some places, Loy says that the world described by Indra's Net is non-teleological.[147] But in other places, Loy admits that, although a linear causation may not exist, another type of causation could be consistent with Indra's Net.[148] Loy's reference to Jung's concept of synchronicity is one way of justifying teleology. It is related to the Taoist idea of order in chance. It is also similar in many ways to Robert Wright's plea for a revision of the idea of randomness in modern science.[149] Therefore, Abhishiktānanda's idea of an order within the world is not necessarily inconsistent with the radical inter-connectedness of Indra's Net. Even Buddhism has teleology in the idea of a Bodhisattva who wants all beings to be liberated.

However, the coherence of Indra's Net is a coherence among beings. Assuming that empirical reality is the same as temporal reality, we could call it an "intra-temporal

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[146] Cf. Krüger: *Along Edges*, p. 49: The secret of human unhappiness is the persistent belief in self-contained entities.

[147] David Loy: "The Deconstruction of Buddhism", *Derrida and Negative Theology*, ed. Harold Coward (State University of New York, 1992), p. 237.

[148] David Loy: "The Difference between saṁsāra and nirvāṇa", *Philosophy East and West* (Oct. 1983), vol. 33 no. 4, p. 363.

[149] Wright, Robert: *Non-zero: The Logic of Human Destiny",* (Pantheon, 1999),

coherence."[150] Is there a Transcendent unity outside of that intra-temporal coherence, or is the Transcendent nothing but that inter-relatedness?

Loy emphatically takes the position that there is no Transcendence other than this coherence of meaning. He rejects a distinction between Being/being as dualistic:

> …Being/being means security to us because it means a ground for the self, whether that is understood as experiencing something Transcendent or intellectually sublimated into a metaphysical principle underlying everything. We want to meet God face-to-face, or gain enlightenment, but the fact that everything is *śūnya* means we can never attain them.[151]

From Loy's perspective, Abhishiktānanda retains a duality of two levels of reality. In Loy's view, there is still a dualism here between Being and beings, the Unmanifested and the Manifested. Loy says that *nirvana* should not be interpreted as transcendental. He says that *nirvana* is neither transcendental nor signified, and that it is nothing other than "the utter dissipation of ontologizing thought."[152] But in this view, Loy is making ontological assumptions of his own. His assumptions, seemingly influenced by Derrida, lead him to deny not only any distinction such as that between Being and being, but the common sense plurality of the world. I suggest that he has ignored the warning of Nāgārjuna, and made *śūnyatā* into a "view." Instead of it merely being a reaction against conceptualizing thought, *śūnyatā* is used to deny all distinctions.

For Abhishiktānanda, *śūnyatā* is a term that he uses to show that nothing can be said conceptually about Being. Abhishiktānanda says that the mission of the Buddha expressed in "drastically negative" terms his intuition *éblouissante* of the inaccessibility of the mystery of Being.[153] This is Abhishiktānanda's radical apophaticism. It is what Panikkar refers to as not only an epistemological apophaticism, but an ontical apophaticism.

Abhishiktānanda's idea that *śūnyatā* relates only to excessive conceptualization has been echoed by some Zen Buddhists. The Vietnamese Buddhist Thich Nhat Hanh says that the idea

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[150] The term is Dooyeweerd's.

[151] David Loy: "Indra's Postmodern Net", *Philosophy East and West* (July. 1933), vol. 43 no. 3, p. 487

[152] *Nonduality,* p. 250.

[153] *Intériorité*, p. 178.

of emptiness was only intended as a means of liberating us from the dogma and overconceptualization that had occurred in Hinduism. He says that the Buddhist notions of impermanence, not-self, interbeing (relatedness) and emptiness are means aimed at revealing the errors of knowledge rather than attempts to give a description of new objects of knowledge. They are methods, not information. According to Thich Nhat Hanh , all that can be said is that the ideas of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) or reality as such (*tathata*) refer to a non-conceptualized reality (not an ontological entity).[154]

For Abhishiktānanda, this reality that cannot be conceptualized is the Transcendent. The "overconceptualization" that he wants to avoid includes any view of the Self as substantial, since that would be a dualism. Although Abhishiktānanda may have started with a static view of *Brahman* similar to the One of Parmenides, he moved to a dynamic view in accordance with his trinitarianism. Panikkar says that the notion of a Trinity could by definition not be a substance.[155]

Could Buddhism accept a trinitarian viewpoint in the sense that Abhishiktānanda suggests? It could be argued that the Yogācāra Mind-Only doctrine is in some ways analogous. I would also point to the Zen Buddhist idea of enlightenment as seeing into the true nature of the world, as this idea has been popularized by D.T. Suzuki and others. On this view, the true nature of reality is transcendent to our conceptual reality.[156]

5. Not a meta-religion

The relativizing of all religious views does not mean that Abhishiktānanda was interested in setting up a meta-religion. In fact, he was critical of Ramakrishna Mission for attempting to do just that. Instead of a meta-religion, Abhishiktānanda encourages a pluralism of religions. But all theologies are on the phenomenal plane, on the level of *nāmarūpa*, how can we choose

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[154] Thich Nhat Hanh: *Zen Keys* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), pp. 110. 113.

[155] See Panikkar, who says that Trinity is not substance: "The very notion of the Trinity ought to suffice to banish any substantialistic interpretation of the divinity, for such an interpretation would be tantamount to tritheism."." *The Silence of God: The Answer of the Buddha* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1989), p. 141.

[156] Loy now regards Suzuki as very dualistic. "The usual bifurcations are central to his [Suzuki's] explanation: intellectual, cerebral, conceptual, conscious, deliberate is bad; existential, visceral, intuitive, unconscious, instinctive is good. Given how much Suzuki criticized dualism, it is difficult to overlook how problematic these ones are." David Loy: "Is Zen Buddhism?" *The Eastern Buddhist* (Autumn, 1995), Vol. 28, No. 2., p. 274.

between them? Abhishiktānanda encourages each person to stay with the religious tradition in which he or she was brought up.[157] The awakened one can return to the rituals of the Church, or of other religions. The *advaitic* experience relativizes our tradition, and forces us to reinterpret it. After the *advaitic* experience, we return to our concepts and beliefs:

> We find ourselves once more Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, for each one has his own line of development, marked out already from his mother's lap. But we also have the 'smile'. Not a smile which looks down condescendingly from above, still less a smile of mockery, but one which is simply an opening out, like the flower unfolding its petals.[158]

Two years earlier, Abhishiktānanda had spoken of this 'smile' of knowing in relation to Fr. Oshida, the Japanese Dominican who was engaged in dialogue with Zen Buddhism. He says of Fr. Oshida,

> Freed from all formulas, he is 'existentially' Christian at a depth so much greater than that which is reached by rites and symbols. . but when it is a question of defining how and why he is Christian, it is impossible capture this reality all explanations are elusive. Only he who has reached the depth can understand one who speaks from the depth. A smile, a freedom, which those who do not know completely misunderstand.[159]

And yet Abhishiktānanda himself did not just give this enigmatic smile. He actively sought to persuade others, especially other Christian, of the relativity of their beliefs, and of the importance of the *advaitic* experience as he understood it.

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[157] Panikkar *Silence of God* p. 102 advisable to renew tradition, not abandon it.

[158] *Letters*, p. 285 (MC 26.1.73).

[159] Letters p. 243 (OB, 30.1.72).

I. Summary

1. Abhishiktānanda's idea of non-monistic *advaita* is an affirmation of the reality of both unity and diversity in the world. He is opposed to a monism that would affirm the reality of only *Brahman* and that would regard the world as illusion. That is why he speaks of *an-eka* (not-one). Abhishiktānanda is also opposed to a dualistic view of God as Wholly Other from the world. That is why he speaks of *advaita* (not-two).

2. The main reason for Abhishiktānanda's non-monistic understanding of *advaita* is his Christian trinitarianism. It influenced him to affirm a unity in diversity, or transcendence in immanence. Abhishiktānanda interprets this trinitarianism in an unorthodox way, in terms of Being. The Father, who is *ekam advitīyam*, One-without-a-Second, gives Himself in love in the process of *kenosis* in manifesting the world or Son. This process is the evolution from the One. The Spirit is the unity between Father and Son, and brings us back unity in the process of involution until God is again all in all. Abhishiktānanda calls this the P*leroma*.

3. Abhishiktānanda initially sees the Hindu *advaitic* experience in need of completion or fulfillment by this trinitarian experience.

4. A separate and inconsistent argument for non-monistic *advaita* is Abhishiktānanda's argument that there are analogues to the trinitarian experience within Hinduism itself. This takes two forms: (a) A non-monistic interpretation of the Upanishads as referring to both a static and dynamic conception of *Brahman* (as emanating the world) and (b) the use of the idea of *śakti* to express the dynamic power of Shiva in the creation of the world.

5. Abhishiktānanda argues that the supple idea of *advaita* contained in the Upanishads was subsequently rigidified by the followers of Shankara, who improperly extended the use of logic to conclude that there is an identity between *Brahman* and the world. This idea of the over-use of logic, or "dialectics" itself assumes the affirmation of both unity and diversity.

6. Abhishiktānanda says that in the *advaitic* experience, we experience the aloneness of the unity of *Brahman*. This experience of *kevala*, or *nirvikalpa samādhi* is beyond all dualities, beyond space and time, and beyond the distinction between subject and object. This is the supreme experience. A person having this experience will no longer fear death because he or she knows the eternal nature of the true Self.

7. A person may die in the *kevala* experience. The enlightened person who survives returns to the world of diversity; this is the *sahaja* experience. A person who is enlightened while still in the body is called a *jīvanmukti*.

8. For Abhishiktānanda, the *advaitic* experience is an experience of wholeness, and not just of a part of our being.

9. Although it can be experienced, the *advaitic* experience cannot be described in conceptual terms. The best way to seek the experience is to be shown it by a *guru*, although Ramaṇa Maharshi obtained the experience without a *guru*.

10. Abhishiktānanda's use of the terms *śakti* and *jīvanmukti* come from non-standard Vedāntic sources like *tantra* and Kashmir Ś*aivism*. These traditions affirm the reality of the world while affirming at the same time the unity of the world in Shiva. Ramaṇa Maharshi and

Gnānānanda had both been influenced by these sources. Abhishiktānanda is not always aware that these ideas are not universally accepted in Vedānta.

11. Abhishiktānanda believed that the *kevala* experience was a necessary stage for the *sahaja* state of the *jīvanmukti*. He understood this to be the position of Ramaṇa Maharshi. In fact, Ramaṇa position was that the *kevala* experience is not necessary.

12. Abhishiktānanda interprets the stage of *kevala* as a stage of purification comparable to the Dark Night of the Soul of the Western mystics. He interpreted the *sahaja* stage as the resurrection from this "death". This is a distinctly Christian interpretation of *sahaja*. The predominant Hindu interpretation is that the only reason that the *jīvanmukti* is still in bodily form is due to his or her *prārabdha karma*, the inertia from past *karma* that continues despite enlightenment.

13. For Abhishiktānanda, the *advaitic* experience is an experience of Being, and he relates it to the revelation of Jahweh, "I am that I am." He says that in our own *advaitic* experience we can have the experience of Jesus, who recognized his nondual relation with God when he knew himself to be a Son of God. It is often unclear whether Abhishiktānanda is referring here to a static conception of Being or the more dynamic one of his trinitarianism and *tantra*.

14. Based on my reading of Abhishiktānanda's descriptions of his experience, he did not achieve the *kevala* experience in the sense that he described it. His disciple Chaduc may have experienced it, and Abhishiktānanda may have had a vicarious experience of it. His own experience was not until his near-death experience in his heart attack in 1973. That does not appear to have been an experience of *kevala* in the sense of Pure Consciousness. That does not mean that Abhishiktānanda did not achieve an *advaitic* experience in the sense of *sahaja*.

15. Abhishiktānanda believes that the *jīvanmukti* sees *Brahman* everywhere. This has ethical implications, since the one who has returned knows his or her inter-relatedness with others and the world. Abhishiktānanda adopts the *tat-tvam-asi* basis of ethics. He does not seem to know that this neo-Hindu idea is itself a Western idea. There is also a conflict in Hinduism as to whether the *Jīvanmukti* is beyond ethics. Neo-Hindu views that the *jīvanmukti* is involved in doing good are probably more influenced by Western traditions, or by Buddhist traditions of the *bodhisattva*.

16. There is in any event a conflict in Abhishiktānanda's ethics between the acosmism associated with seeking the *kevala* experience and the relation to the world and others in the *sahaja* experience. In my opinion, Abhishiktānanda emphasized monasticism too much, and did not develop an ethic for the *jīvanmukti* except in very general terms. I believe that Panikkar is correct in his opinion that Chaduc was responsible for Abhishiktānanda's reversion to a more monistic view.

17. If Abhishiktānanda did not achieve the *kevala* state, but nevertheless had an *advaitic* experience, this raises questions regarding the purpose of meditation. If an experience of Pure Consciousness is not necessary, how is meditation still useful? My preliminary answer is that it is still useful in achieving an experience beyond our concepts, in the sense of the Yogic Model. This is a state where the ego is transcended, and there is a sense of inter-relatedness with others and the world, and of seeing *Brahman* everywhere. It is a state where distinctions are still seen in this inter-relatedness. It is not a loss of distinction between subject and object, as in Pure Consciousness. If one does go to the level of Pure

Consciousness in meditation, then a return to the world of diversity is required. It is this *sahaja* state that is important, as Ramaṇa has emphasized.

18. Abhishiktānanda's ideas do not fit neatly into any one religion. He relativizes all religions, just as he relativizes all our concepts. And yet he acknowledges the necessity of myth and religion, as well as concepts. Like neo-Hinduism, Abhishiktānanda regards Scripture as the record of the *advaitic* experience. He also relativizes all doctrines as being the result of conceptualization in the real of *nāmarūpa* (names and forms).
19. Abhishiktānanda's non-monistic *advaita* challenges Christianity in that he reinterprets almost every doctrine, including creation, sin, salvation and the uniqueness of Christ.
20. Abhishiktānanda's non-monistic *advaita* challenges Hinduism to interpret *māyā* not as the illusory nature of the world but as the *śakti* of *Brahman*.
21. Abhishiktānanda's non-monistic *advaita* has some similarities with some forms of Buddhism. His view of the inter-relatedness of all things is similar to the analogy of Indra's Net. His view of the nature of reality as nonconceptual is similar to some interpretations of Zen Buddhism that emphasize the 'Suchness' of Reality (*tathata*) as nonconceptual. It is also similar to Thich Nhat Hanh's view that the Buddhist notions of impermanence, not-self, interbeing (relatedness) and emptiness are means aimed at revealing the errors of knowledge rather than attempts to give a description of new objects of knowledge
22. Abhishiktānanda believes in a Transcendent, although not one that can be conceptualized. This does not mean that we are back in a dualistic view of form over matter, or of substance over accidents. Reality [God, *Brahman*, the Tao, Suchness, *Śūnyatā*] is transcendent in the sense that it is beyond the empirical aspects of being. Reality is on a different level from these empirical aspects of being. It is not transcendent in the sense of being a separate reality. It is transcendent as the true nature of the reality that we experience. The Transcendent is not a Wholly Other; it is related to the world as the Unmanifested is related to the Manifested. The true nature of Reality is therefore nondual with the empirical reality that we experience. There are similarities here to Heidegger in Abhishiktānanda's view of conceptualization, and in the view of a distinction between Being and beings.

In Abhishiktānanda's idea of non-monistic *advaita*, unity does not swallow up diversity. Abhishiktānanda says in *Guhāja*: "Never have things been as real and their distinction as real and their harmony as real as in the Emptiness which is the Real itself."[160] This applies to Abhishiktānanda himself. In attempting to live out this kind of non-monistic *advaita*, his own individuality was revealed. Alan Watts says "one of the most interesting traits of mysticism is that those who have experienced most keenly their union with God are intensely real and unique

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[160] *Guhāja*, p. 21 (unpublished).

personalities."[161] Abhishiktānanda was certainly someone with a real and unique personality. What is so fascinating about Abhishiktānanda is that he lived out many of the issues and contradictions that he wrote about. His honesty and integrity in the search for the *advaitic* experience are evident, and he expressed his doubts and anguish along the way. It is this integrity that makes his story so compelling. It was a heroic quest for enlightenment, which he himself compares to the quest for the Grail. He questioned his most fundamental beliefs, both about his own religion, Christianity, and about the Hinduism that he was investigating. The record that Abhishiktānanda has left is a record of this search, and a pointer to the experience that he says is both non-monistic (*aneka*) and nondual (*advaita*).

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[161] Alan Watts: *Behold the Spirit* (New York: Random House, 1971, originally published 1947), p. 144.

Appendix: The Influence of C.G. Jung on Abhishiktānanda

C.G. Jung was a major influence on Abhishiktānanda. Most of Abhishiktānanda's references to Jung are scattered throughout his writings. He also wrote an article on archetypes. When these references are taken as a whole they provide one possible synthesis of Abhishiktānanda's of non-monistic *advaita*. This idea of non-monistic *advaita* is also illuminating for several problems in Jung's work, especially since Jung's ideas are themselves influenced by Hinduism. I have also shown how some of Jung's ideas may have derived from Ramaṇa Maharshi, of whom Jung was aware.

A. Abhishiktānanda's Discovery of Jung

Abhishiktānanda was introduced to Jung's ideas after he arrived in India. His first reference to Jung is in 1954.[1] The following year, at the library of the Jesuit Seminary at Shembaganur, Abhishiktānanda read more of Jung's writings. After his discovery of Jung, Abhishiktānanda wrote Fr. Lemarié that the whole problem of religious renewal of the western monk and of access to Christ of the oriental world must be rethought in the light of Jung's theories of the archetypes and the *libido*-analogues.[2]

Abhishiktānanda also wrote to Monchanin about Jung. Monchanin replied that he knew little of Jung and more of Freud. In his reply, Monchanin says that both Jung and Freud are "far from Christianity". He also says that he "has reservations" and "is on the defensive" with respect to the ideas of the collective unconscious and archetypes. Monchanin makes the negative comment that he sees some connection between tantrism and the drawings of psychopaths. He says that Jung's ideas of "hiérophanies"[3] and archetypes level the Christian originality and place

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[1] *Diary*, p. 96 (26.7.54).

[2] See *Abbé Monchanin: Lettres au Père Le Saux*, ed. Françoise Jacquin (Paris: Cerf, 1995), p. 187 (28.3.55). As we shall see, Jung compares *Brahman* to *libido*; in this way, he gives a very dynamic view of *Brahman*, possibly due to Jung's knowledge of *kundalini.* Freud had used the term *libido* to refer to the sexual drive behind human activity. Jung uses the term as meaning psychic energy in general.

[3] M. Eliade introduced the term 'hierophanies'. They are physical manifestations or revelations of the sacred in our human experience. They are often in the form of symbols, myths, and rituals. Any phenomenal entity is a potential hierophany and can give access to non-historical time: what Eliade calls *illud tempus*. See Mircea Eliade: *The*

it alongside *gnosis*.[4] But if Monchanin was suspicious of Jung's idea of archetypes, Abhishiktānanda embraced the idea.

In July 1955, Abhishiktānanda met D.K. Mehta, who also told him about Jungian archetypes. Abhishiktānanda compares Mehta's type of meditation to psychoanalysis:

> It is a matter of integrating into consciousness the whole world of the "memory". In order at the same time to bring it to the consciousness of this trans-liminal and through the development of consciousness, beyond this trans-liminal. And this involves a transformation of consciousness itself. For better and for worse, since this "trans-gression" [passing-over] of the immediate world of our experience leads us at the same time into the subconscious and the supra-conscious. The kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light, symbolized by the fact that sleep, with its special rhythm of breathing and calming, can be realized, or rather obtain its fullness, equally well in the state of unconsciousness and the state of supra-consciousness. At that point the potentialities of one's psychological make-up are released. They are at once both powers and their contents, which are moreover as inseparable from one another as are, for example, matter and energy in the constitution of matter. From this viewpoint there is "only" energy, only powers, powers able to produce and develop the object of their own activity. In the last analysis we are in C.G. Jung's world of archetypes. Metapsychic powers are then necessarily attained, together with potential effects on the body and on matter.[5]

There are many ideas in this passage. He says that meditation integrates the subconscious (the trans-liminal, the kingdom of darkness) into consciousness. By becoming conscious of it, we pass to the state of supra-consciousness (the kingdom of light). This releases the powers of the archetypes, and gives the meditator metapsychic powers. This state of supra-consciousness is compared to sleep, but it is also said to be an increase in consciousness.

It seems to me that Abhishiktānanda is describing the state of the *jīvanmukti* who returns, or passes through the experience of the unconscious, which is identified with darkness, as in the

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Sacred and the profane: the nature of religion (Harper and Row, 1961). Eliade is associated with Jung in that they both attended meetings of the Eranos Group. Both Monchanin and Abhishiktānanda were familiar with some of Eliade's work. *Jules Monchanin: Mystique de l'Inde, mystère chrétien*, ed. Suzanne Siauve (Paris: Fayard, 1974) p. 139.

[4] See *Abbé Monchanin: Lettres au Père Le Saux*, ed. Françoise Jacquin (Paris: Cerf, 1995), p. 187 (17.3.55). It is unclear why Monchanin was reticent to discuss Jung with Abhishiktānanda. Monchanin had read Jung as a student. And from his writings, it is clear that he had followed some of the debates. He refers to P. White's book, *God and the Unconscious*, 1957. He was also familiar with the Eranos Yearbooks. See *Jules Monchanin: Mystique de l'Inde, Mystère Chrétien*, ed. Suzanne Siauve (Paris: Fayard, 1974), p. 138.

[5] *Diary*, p. 107 (28.7.55).

dark night of the soul. The *jīvanmukti* is in the state of "waking sleep." He or she also has "metapsychic powers", or *siddhis*. I will come back to this idea of the *jīvanmukti* and the increase in consciousness.

In a *Diary* entry of August 1955 Abhishiktānanda compares his previous experience at Arunāchala with psychoanalysis; he says that the experience there was "a sudden integration of new zones of the subconscious." He compares psychoanalysis to the yogic penetration to the depths:

> In any case, whether through psychoanalysis under the guidance of a specialist or through the slow psychoanalysis of life, through yogic penetration to the depth of the soul or through circumstances which more abruptly disclose to each of us depths previously unknown, it happens that we make contact with regions of our being, deeper and more essential than those in which what people call faith has taken root. Then the world of mythical and conceptual symbols is left behind.[6]

This "leaving behind of mythical and conceptual symbols" is the loss of our superimpositions. Abhishiktānanda also specifically links this disclosure of the depths to the leaving behind of mythical and conceptual symbols. It may include the apparent loss of our faith, but the loss is really a liberation and an advance towards personal integrity. The loss of one's faith after psychoanalysis is not really a loss of faith, but rather the "disappearance of a monstrous excrescence in one's consciousness." For the person who loses faith, religion had been the expression of a "monstrous complex."

In 1956, Abhishiktānanda says that the yogic descent to the depth of oneself is the retun to sources of oneself that are more primordial than those in which a person was conceived within his mother s womb.[7] By "primordial sources" he is referring to the archetypes (he mentions the archetypes in the same *Diary* entry). This is confirmed by what he writes that same year in *Secret* about his visit to Ramaṇa six years before. He describes the first time he heard the chanting at Ramaṇa's ashram. He says that the chants "issue from the archetypal sources of

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[6] *Diary*, p. 120 (30.8.55). Abhishiktānanda makes a similar comment in 1959 in *Lettres d'un sannyāsī chrétien à Joseph Lemarié*, p. 222 (3.6.59): "Le Soi, l'être se révélant *dreadful* (redoubtable) par-delà le *dark* des archétypes en attendant l'apparation toute de paix et de resplendissment du matin."

[7] *Diary*, p. 186 (30.11.56).

being", and that they "irresistibly draw those who chant them or hear them into the same most secret sources of being."[8] He also describes the next afternoon when he saw Ramaṇa:

> The fever, my sleepiness, a condition that was half dreaming, seemed to release in me zones of para-consciousness in which all that I saw or heard aroused overwhelmingly powerful echoes. […] Unknown harmonies awoke in my heart.[9]

These descriptions are retrospective; Abhishiktānanda is interpreting his experience with Ramaṇa in terms of Jung, whose works he had not read at the time he visited Ramaṇa. He is giving a Jungian interpretation to what was an overwhelming experience for him.

In the book *Secret* Abhishiktānanda also refers to his return from Ramaṇa's ashram to Shantivanam. He says that his dreams included attempts to incorporate his experience into his previous mental structures without shattering them.[10] This reference to dreams also seems to be new. In any event, he continues to interpret dreams. In 1958, he refers to a "very clear Jungian dream" that Harold Rose had.[11] Abhishiktānanda says that the dream has its own truth. The truth of the dream is in the psychic "drive" that is its basis:

> I call it drive, but the word matters little. There is an existential psychic 'happening', the rising up to the level of consciousness of a deep drive. As the restraints of the waking state no longer exist, from this original drive a vast scenario is projected, opens out, etc. A person lives this existential psychic event internally—with joy and sorrow, calm and anxiety, etc. as the case may be. The truth of the dream is this inner event that the dream expresses.[12]

His use of the phrase "deep drive" seems to correspond to Jung's idea of *libido*. Abhishiktānanda speaks of his dreams just after his heart attack. He clearly sees these dreams as giving a message to him. The message he got from his dreams was that it was not necessary to continue to push himself to more and more arduous tasks in order to reach enlightenment.[13]

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[8] *Secret*, p. 7. This book was drafted as early as 1956. That is more than six years after the visits to Ramaṇa, and after Abhishiktānanda had read Jung and been exposed to Mehta's ideas.

[9] *Ibid*. p. 9.

[10] *Ibid.*

[11] *Lettres d'un sannyāsī chrétien à Joseph Lemarié*, p. 212 (12.7.58). Rose was the friend who introduced him to Gnānānanda.

[12] *Diary*, pp. 367,368 (2.2.73).

[13] *Diary*, p. 386 (11.9.73).

Abhishiktānanda's comparison between psychoanalysis and Vedānta continued to be important to him all his life. In 1970 he writes that both psychoanalysis and Vedānta aim at the freeing of the psyche from the knots of the heart that prevent the free flight of the psyche.[14] A few days later he again compares Jungian psychoanalysis and Vedānta: "Vedantin experience just as much drains people and is just as dangerous as drugs or psycho-analysis."[15] In *Further Shore*, based on the last articles he wrote, he says that the mystery that is expressed by religions, the mystery we bear within ourselves, is the same mystery which modern psychology is beginning to glimpse beyond our observable nature.[16] This is the mystery of the Self. We need to now look at Jung's view of the Self.

B. Jung and Hinduism

1. The Idea of the Self

Abhishiktānanda's comparison of psychoanalysis and the mystery of the Self is borne out by Jung's own thought. Jung's first use of the term "Self" appears in *Psychological Types*, and he acknowledges his indebtedness to Eastern ideas:

> I have chosen the term "self" to designate the totality of man, the sum total of his conscious and unconscious contents. I have chosen this term in accordance with Eastern philosophy, which for centuries has occupied itself with the problems that arise when even the gods cease to incarnate. The philosophy of the Upanishads corresponds to a psychology that long ago recognized the relativity of the gods. This is not to be confused with a stupid error like atheism.[17]

Jung refers extensively to *Brahman* and to the idea of uniting of opposites. He says that *Brahman* is the union and dissolution of all opposites, and at the same time stands outside them as an irrational factor.[18] Jung sees *Brahman* in dynamic terms. He says that *Brahman* coincides

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[14] *Diary*, p. 321 (22.10.70).

[15] *Letters*, p. 318 (MC, 26.10.73). He also compares psychoanalysts with gurus. *"Guru (ou Psychothérapeute)"* 9.7.71 MS, 1-3 D/1971 (unpublished). The guru/psychologist is the one who has attained his Self. Only the awakened one can awaken someone else.

[16] "Approach to the Upanishads", *Further Shore,* p. 65.

[17] C.G. Jung: "Psychology and Religion: The History and Psychology of a Natural Symbol", *Collected Works,* Vol. 11, p. 82, para. 140.

[18] C.G. Jung: *Psychological Types* (Princeton, 1971), p. 198, para. 330.

with a dynamic or creative principle that he calls *libido*.[19] Jung says that what he calls the unconscious is "an exact replica of the Indian concept of super or supreme consciousness.[20] Jung says that Indian philosophy is the interpretation given to the precise condition of the non-ego. Jung's picture of *Brahman* as coinciding with a dynamic or creative principle fits with Abhishiktānanda's view of *Brahman*. As discussed, this view may be in the early Upanishads, and in later *tantra*, but it is not the usual interpretation of Advaita Vedānta.

Jung says that the goal of our psychic development is the Self. We often confuse the Self with our ego. But Self is always something other than ego.[21] Therefore Jung's idea of psychic development means going beyond a limited ego.

For Jung the Self is not just an image in our psyche, but a being with reality of its own. Jung sees the aim of human development as bringing about an approach to and connection between the specific nature of the non-ego and the conscious ego. The process of achieving this goal is the process that Jung calls 'individuation'. Individuation is becoming that which is not the ego. Jung speaks of the necessity to get beyond our intellect and to break through to a "knowledge of the knower", the Self. He says that this passion to know the Self is indistinguishable from the driving force of religion.

Jung refers to these experiences of the non-ego as mystical.[22] He says that in Zen, the experience of *satori* is interpreted as the breakthrough into a non-ego-like Self.[23] Jung refers to the experience of mystics like Eckhart and John of Ruysbroeck, and their openness to other, non-ego influences. Jung also refers to this experience as a kind of perception. He says that in the mystical experience, another subject appears in place of the ego. One sees differently. It is not a

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[19] C.G. Jung: *Psychological Types* (Princeton, 1971), p. 201, para. 336. At p. 118, para 188 Jung says that *Brahman-ātman* is a primordial image of the unconscious.

[20] CG. Jung: Letter to Subrahamanya Iyer (in English), Jan 9, 1939, *C.G. Jung Letters*, ed. Gerhard Adler (Princeton, 1973), vol. 1, p. 255.

[21] Foreword to "Introduction to Zen Buddhism", *Psychology and the East,* (Princeton, 1978), p. 142, para. 885. As Wilber says, any "self" of which we are conscious is absolutely, unequivocally and most definitely not our Self. *The Marriage of Sense and Soul* (New York: Broadway Books, 1999), p. 327.

[22] *The Psychology of Kundalini Yoga: Notes of the Seminar Given in 1932 by C.G. Jung* (Princeton: Bollingen, 1996), p. 28.

[23] Foreword to "Introduction to Zen Buddhism", *Psychology and the East* (Princeton, 1978), p. 143, para. 887.

matter of seeing something else.[24] It is a letting go of oneself, an emptying of ideas and images.[25] Jung says that a vision of light is common to many mystics; this vision has to do with

> …an acute state of consciousness, as intense as it is abstract, a 'detached' consciousness, which as Hildegard implies, brings into awareness areas of psychic happenings ordinarily covered in darkness. The fact that the general bodily sensations disappear during the experience suggests that their specific energy has been withdrawn and has apparently gone towards heightening the clarity of consciousness.[26]

The energy saved goes to the unconscious, and increases the readiness of the unconscious to break through into consciousness.[27]

Abhishiktānanda also speaks of enlightenment as *satori*, and in terms of going beyond our ego. In a *Diary* entry from 1972 Abhishiktānanda compares Jung's idea of the Self with the Self of the Upanishads:

> The '*self*' of Jung and the Upanishadic '*self*': Jung's self is at the empirical level–at the very moment when the '*self*'–the Purusha, the *ātman*–springs up in the *psychê*. This '*self*' is manifested in the three well-known states [dream, sleep and the unconscious]. The third is that of the subconscious (both personal and collective), but when the '*Self*' is attained in oneself, '*as in a glimpse'*–and *turiya* [the "fourth," the transcendental state] The '*self*' is revealed, for example, in confrontation with the '*shadow*', etc., in the bubbling up of the spring that relativizes all projection, that of oneself in the first place, and leaves us gasping with the question, who am I? [*ko'ham*].[28]

Abhishiktānanda therefore relates Jung's self to the third state of consciousness (deep dreamless sleep). For Abhishiktānanda, this is the level where the archetypes, including the Self, are manifested, and this is where Abhishiktānanda locates the collective unconscious. He says that enlightenment occurs at the fourth level, *turīya*, beyond all manifestation in the empirical level. Attaining this fourth state means moving beyond the level of the archetypes. I will come back to this point.

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[24] *Ibid.* p. 146, para. 891.

[25] *Ibid.* p. 147, para. 893.

[26] "Commentary on *The Secret of the Golden Flower*", *Psychology and the East* (Princeton, 1978), pp. 29, 30, para. 43.

[27] Foreword to "Introduction to Zen Buddhism", *Psychology and the East,* (Princeton, 1978), p. 151, para. 898.

[28] *Diary*, pp. 360, 361 (30.10.72).

2. Jung and Ramaṇa

Jung was aware of Ramaṇa and of Ramaṇa's teachings. One of the sources for this knowledge was Paul Brunton. Brunton is the writer who is most responsible for introducing Ramaṇa Maharshi to the Western World. He met Ramaṇa in 1931, and published a book about his meeting in 1934.[29] In 1937 Jung met Brunton along with V. Subrahamanya Iyer, who represented India at the International Congress of Philosophy at the Sorbonne. Jung invited both of them to his residence at Küsnacht, where they discussed problems of Indian philosophy.[30] The following year Jung made an expedition to India. He again met with Iyer, who was then the *guru* to the Maharajah of Mysore, and they had "searching talks."[31] During this time, Brunton was also with Iyer. On both of these occasions, it seems most probable that Brunton and Iyer would have discussed Ramaṇa.

It is also interesting that Jung had an opportunity to visit Ramaṇa Maharshi during this expedition to India in 1938. He chose not to try to meet Ramaṇa. Jung did meet a disciple of Ramaṇa, the Dutch sociologist Dr. Gualthernus H. Mees, with whom he later corresponded.

Jung was also made aware of Ramaṇa through the Indologist Heinrich Zimmer. Jung met Zimmer in the 1930's when Zimmer was Professor of Sanskrit at Heidelberg. Zimmer attended some of the meetings at Eranos. Most importantly, Zimmer translated some writings of Ramaṇa into German.[32] Jung's failure to meet Ramaṇa greatly disappointed Zimmer.[33]

Zimmer's book on *Ramaṇa* was published in 1954, but it is not clear how much earlier Zimmer had begun work or discussed Ramaṇa with Jung. Jung wrote an introduction to

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[29] Paul Brunton: A *Search in Secret India* (London: Rider & Co., 1934).

[30] Letter from C.G. Jung to V. Subrahamanya Iyer, Sept 16, 1937 (in English *C.G. Jung Letters*, ed. Gerhard Adler (Princeton, 1973), vol. 1, p. 236, ft. 2.

[31] *Memories, Dreams, Reflections,* ed. Aniela Jaffé (New York: Vintage, 1989 first published 1961), pp.256, 274.

[32] Heinrich Zimmer: *Der Weg Zum Selbst: Lehre und Leben des indischen heiligen Shri Ramana Maharshi aus Tiruvannamalei* (Zurich: Rascher, 1954).

[33] Clarke speculates why Jung did not see Ramaṇa: "It may be that Jung, in order to maintain his stance of independence, felt it necessary to avoid a man who, by repute, may well have been able to penetrate his defences, for just as he had since his boyhood refused to bend his knee to the Christian way of faith, so with regard to Eastern spirituality his attitude remained one of guarded objectivity. He could not, as he expressed it, "accept from others what I could not attain on my own, or make any borrowings from the East, but must shape my life out of myself'." J.J. Clarke, *C.G. Jung on the East* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 8 [citation from *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, p. 275].

Zimmer's book. The introduction makes it clear that Jung had read the translated ideas of Ramaṇa. He says, "Shri Ramaṇa's thoughts are beautiful to read."[34] He was also aware of how Ramaṇa's sympathetic views on his disciples' activity in the world differed from that of another sage, Ramakrishna.[35] Jung also writes of Ramaṇa's equation of the self and God, which he says Westerners would find shocking.[36] Joseph Campbell said that Jung had misunderstood Ramaṇa and that it was not the Personal Self (*jiva*) that was identical with God, but rather the Imperishable Self (*ātman*).[37] But Campbell's remarks still make use of the idea of "identity." I believe that Abhishiktānanda's idea of non-monistic *advaita* gives a better solution to the issue.

3. Possible influence of Ramaṇa on Jung

As I have discussed, Ramaṇa's chief teaching was to find the Self; that Self is different from our ego. Ramaṇa centered all his spiritual guidance and teaching on the simple question "Who am I?" The searcher was encouraged to ask, "who is the actor behind the acting, the thinking behind the thought, the one who wills behind the act of willing?" If the searcher finds out who he or she really is, the spiritual experience will inevitably follow. Ramana called this the 'inquiry into the *ātman*', that is to say, the quest and pursuit of the Self within the self, beyond all its external manifestations.

Many of Jung's statements about the Self are similar to Ramaṇa's statements. Here are some of these statements:

> (1) An Indian guru can explain everything and you can imitate everything. But do you know *who* is applying the yoga? In other words, do you know who you are and how you are constituted?[38] [Published in 1936]
>
> (2) But since modern research has acquainted us with the fact that individual consciousness is based on and surrounded by an indefinitely extended unconscious psyche, we must needs revise our somewhat old-fashioned prejudice

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[34] "Holy Men of India", *Psychology and the East,* (Princeton, 1978), p. 179, para. 955.

[35] *Ibid.* p. 182, para. 958.

[36] *Ibid.* p. 182, para. 959.

[37] Joseph Campbell: Review of *Der Weg Zum Selbst* in *Review of Religion* 11, no. 3 (March, 1947), 290-293. Jung was certainly familiar with the idea of *ātman.* In fact, Jung contrasts ego and *ātman* in the Introduction that Campbell reviewed (p. 180, para. 956).

[38] C.G. Jung: "Yoga and the West" (1936), *Psychology and the East,* (Princeton, 1978), p. 82, para. 869.

> that man is nothing but his consciousness. This naïve assumption must be confronted at once with the critical question: *Whose* consciousness?[39] [From 1937]
>
> (3) A rare philosophic passion is needed to compel the attempt to get beyond intellect and break through to a "knowledge of the knower." Such a passion is practically indistinguishable from the driving force of religion; consequently this whole problem belongs to the religious transformation process, which is incommensurable with intellect.[40] [From 1939]
>
> (4) …find him who seeks[41] [from 1939]
>
> (5) Self-recollection is a gathering together of the self. It is in this sense that we have to understand the instructions which Monoimos gives to Theophrastus:
>
>> Seek him [God] from out thyself, and learn who it is that taketh possession of everything in thee, saying: *my* god*, my* spirit *[nous], my* understanding, *my* soul, *my* body…"[42]
>
> (6) We are so hemmed in by things which jostle and oppress that we never get a chance in the midst of all these 'given' things, to wonder by whom they are 'given'.**[43]**

Jung does not acknowledge the influence of Ramaṇa Maharshi, but the parallels are striking. Jung could have known about Ramaṇa Maharshi at the time he made these statements about the Self. If he did not know, then the parallel with Ramaṇa's ideas is still remarkable, and provides a good basis for using Jung to interpret Ramaṇa's experience.

Jung himself explicitly compares the path of liberation of Ramaṇa to what is achieved in Western mysticism:

> The goal of Eastern religious practice is the same as that of Western mysticism: the shifting of the center of gravity from the ego to the self, from man to God. This means that the ego disappears in the self, and man in God. It is evident that Shri Ramaṇa has either really been more or less absorbed by the self, or has at least struggled earnestly all his life to extinguish his ego in it.[44]

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[39] C.G. Jung: "Psychology and religion: the History and Psychology of a Natural Symbol": (1937*), Collected Works* (Princeton, 1969), vol. 11, p. 82, para. 140.

[40] C.G. Jung: Foreword to "Introduction to Zen Buddhism", *Psychology and the East,* (Princeton, 1978), p. 147, para. 892.

[41] *Ibid.* p. 155, para. 905.

[42] C.G. Jung, "Transformation Symbolism in the Mass" (1940), *Collected Works,* Vol. 11, p. 264, para. 399.

[43] C.G. Jung: "On the Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation", *Collected Works,* Vol. 11, p. 513, para. 841. From Hippolytus: *Elenchos*, VIII, 15.

[44]*C.G. Jung:* "The Holy Men of India", *Psychology and the East* (Princeton, 1978), p. 181, para. 958.

4. Jung's evaluation of Ramaṇa's religious experience

Jung says a claim to have had a religious experience cannot be disputed:

> You can only say that you have never had such an experience, whreupon your opponent will reply: "Sorry, I have." And there your discussion will come to an end. No matter what the world thinks about religious experience, the one who has it possesses a great treasure, a thing that has become for him a source of life, meaning and beauty, and that has given a new splendour to the world and to mankind. He has *pistis* and peace. Where is the criterion by which you could say that such a life is not legitimate, that such an experience is not valid, and that such *pistis* is mere illusion? Is there, as a matter of fact, any better truth about the ultimate things than the one that helps you to live?[45]

And yet even within this statement, Jung gives criteria by which to evaluate an experience. Is the experience a source of life, meaning and beauty? Is the experience one that has helped that person to live? Has it resulted in a transformation of the person who had the experience? These are pragmatic criteria that are similar to those by William James.

Jung disagreed with what he saw as the message of Ramaṇa. He wrote to one of Ramaṇa's disciples:

> I consider a man's life lived for 65 years in perfect balance as most unfortunate. I'm glad that I haven't chosen to live such a miracle. It is so utterly inhuman that I can't see for the life of me any fun in it. It is surely very wonderful but think of being wonderful year in year out! Moreover I think it is generally much more advisable not to identify with the self. I quite appreciate the fact that such a model is of high paedagogical value to India.[46]

Jung becomes quite sarcastic in this letter. He refers to Ramaṇa's enlightenment experience as a child:

> I wonder wherein his self-realization consists and what he actually did do. We know this running away business from parents etc. with our saints, too! But some of them have done something tangible–if it was only a crusade or something like a book or the *Canto di Sole*. I had a chance, when I was in Madras, to see the Maharshi, but by that time I was so imbued with the overwhelming Indian atmosphere of irrelevant wisdom and with the obvious Maya of this world that I didn't care any more if there had been twelve Maharshis on top of each other. I was profoundly overawed and the black pagoda of Bhuvaneshvara took all the air

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[45] C.G. Jung: "Psychology and Religion: West and East", *Collected Works*, Vol. 11, p. 104, par. 167.

[46] Letter from C.G. Jung to Gualthernus H. Mees, in English, Sept. 15, 1947, *C.G. Jung Letters*, ed. Gerhard Adler (Princeton, 1973), p. 477. Jung had met Mees in India.

> out of me. India is marvelous, unique, and I wish I could stand once more on Cape Cormorin and know once more that this world is an incurable illusion. This is a very helpful and salutary insight, when you must not live daily in this damn machinery and these undeniable realities which behave exactly as if they were real.

It is interesting to compare this evaluation of Ramaṇa with that of Ken Wilber. Wilber writes that although Ramaṇa's Self-realization was unsurpassed, he is not an exemplary representative of an integral view. In other words, he did not live a life integrated in all of Wilber's four quadrants.[47]

C. Jung's understanding of Concepts

Abhishiktānanda emphasized the importance of experience over concepts. As we have seen, Abhishiktānanda speaks of our pre-conceptual knowledge in terms of 'intuition'. Jung also refers to intuition. He says that our intuitive knowledge in the psyche precedes our conscious theorizing about that experience. This intuitive knowledge is more complete than consciousness.[48] Intuition is not made, it comes to us. We "have a hunch", we "catch it". In contrast to this intuitive knowledge, our conscious knowledge is fragmentary and splits up the knowledge into simple units.[49] Consciousness cannot produce more than a partial and partisan truth; it is not capable of psychic wholeness.[50] Jung says that the word "concept" comes from the Latin *concipiere*, "to take something by grasping it thoroughly."[51] When our consciousness gets so one-sided it gets out of touch with the primordial images and a breakdown ensues.[52] Jung

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[47] Ken Wilber: *One Taste* (Boston: Shambhala, 1999), p. 201. For Wilber's quadrants, the x-axis is Interior/Exterior and the y-axis is Individual/Collective. All quadrants can be lived on many levels such as physical, emotional, mental, soul and spirit. See *The Marriage of Sense and Soul* (New York: Random House, 1998), p. 64.

[48] C.G. Jung, "Psychology and religion: Dogma and Natural Symbols", *Collected Works,* Vol. 11, p. 41, para. 69.

[49] C.G. Jung: "Foreword to "Introduction to Zen Buddhism", *Psychology and the East,* (Princeton, 1978), p. 152, para. 900.

[50] *Ibid*. p. 156.

[51] C.G. Jung: "What India Can Teach Us", first published in 1939 and reproduced in J.J. Clarke*, C.G. Jung on the East* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 57-60. Jung's idea of the "grasping" nature of concepts is very similar to Heidegger.

[52] "Commentary on The Secret of the Golden Flower", *Psychology and the East* (Princeton, 1978), p. 15, para. 15.

contrasts this one-sided consciousness with the intuitive, the unexpected, all-embracing, completely illuminating answer.[53]

For Abhishiktānanda, our theological concepts can never capture what God is; our theology must be based on experience:

> Only a theology founded on the experience of the Self will be capable of breaking the barriers which close off the religious systems which are founded on myth and concepts.[54]

Jung also distinguishes between religious experiences and creeds. He says that every creed or belief is based upon a previous religious experience:

> Creeds are codified and dogmatized forms of original religious experiences. The contents of the experience have become sanctified and are usually congealed in a rigid, often elaborate, structure of ideas.[55]

The idea of the experience "congealing" in a rigid structure is similar to Abhishiktānanda's idea of experience "sclerosing" into concepts. I have discussed how Abhishiktānanda believed that the doctrine of the Trinity had not been understood. This is why he wrote *Amour et Sagesse* for his mother. C.G. Jung relates his profound disappointment as a boy when his father, who was a pastor, was unable to explain the doctrine of the Trinity to him.[56] Jung later reinterpreted the doctrine for himself, and even called for a "quaternity" in God. Abhishiktānanda says that there is a quaternity in Eckhart's thought.[57]

Jung says that the psychologist disregards the claim of each creed to be the unique and eternal truth, but rather is "concerned with the original religious experience quite apart from what the creeds have made of it."[58] The creed protects the adherent from the potentially terrifying and disruptive forces that are unleashed in the original religious experience. Abhishiktānanda makes

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[53] "Foreword to Introduction to Zen Buddhism", *Psychology and the East* (Princeton, 1978), p. 552.

[54] "Archétypes religieux, expérience du soi et théologie chrétienne" *Intériorité*, p. 184. (My translation).

[55] C.G. Jung: "Psychology and Religion: The Autonomy of the Unconscious", *Collected Works,* Vol. 11, p. 9, par. 10.

[56] C.G. Jung: *Memories, Dreams*, *Reflections*, ed. Aniela Jaffé (New York: Vintage, 1989), p. 53.

[57] "Theologoumenon Upasana: méditation sur la Trinité", *Intériorité*, (1970), p. 227.

[58] C.G. Jung: "Psychology and Religion," *Collected Works*, vol. 11, p. 9, para. 10.

a similar statement. He says that doctrines were developed in order to shield people from the force of the immediate experience.[59]

It is not only our creeds that seek to protect us against the forces in the original experience. Jung says that our concepts in general can be used for the same purpose when we use those concepts in a reductivist way. Reductivism is the explanation of complex phenomena in terms of what is believed to be simpler, underlying processes. For example, reductivism claims that religion is "nothing but" something else, thus, religious phenomena are reduced to that something else. Jung was opposed to psychology's attempts to reduce experiences to what is known:

> …if he [the psychotherapist] is a slave to his quasi-biological credo he will always try to reduce what he has glimpsed to the banal and the known, to a rationalistic denominator which satisfies only those who are content with illusions.[60]

Jung says that one reason that scientists are tempted to reduce everything to known concepts is their fear of the unknown. They are afraid to open the door of the unconscious, so they say that our religious experiences of the unconscious are "nothing but" something else.[61]

D. Jung and Symbols

Jung emphasizes the symbolic nature of religious language. Symbols exceed the comprehension of the conscious mind; they speak from the archetypes in the unconscious. A religious experience strives for expression, and, because it transcends understanding, it can only be expressed symbolically.[62]

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[59] In "Dans Le Centre Le Plus Profond", *Guhāntara* (unpublished).

[60] C.G. Jung, Foreword to "Introduction to Zen Buddhism" (1939) *Psychology and the East,* (Princeton, 1978), p. 155, para. 905. Jung was sensitive to the charge of psychologism in his own work. His response was: "I think the accusation of 'psychologism' can be leveled only at an intellect that denies the genuine nature of the autonomous complex and seeks to explain it rationalistically as the consequence of known causes, i.e. as something secondary and unreal." "Commentary on The Secret of the Golden Flower", *Psychology and the East* (Princeton, 1978), p. 27, para. 75.

[61] C.G. Jung: *The Psychology of Kundalini Yoga* (Princeton, 1996), p. 33. This terrifying experience of the emotions is one stage in the awakening of Kundalini. Jung relates it to the third *cakra*, the center of the emotions. In the fourth *cakra*, there is a withdrawal from the more emotional function.

[62] Hacker says that Shankara also used myths. "Shankara avoids epistemology and prefers, where he feels he has to theorize, an almost mythological cosmology. He perhaps believes that myths are an easier way to mystical

The word "symbol" from the Greek *symballein*, to gather things together. Jacobi comments on this:

> …for even its etymological significance, *symballein*, "to throw together," postulates a manifold disparate content. As a uniter of opposites the symbol is a totality which can never be addressed only to one faculty in a man–his reason or intellect, for example–but always concerns our wholeness, touches and produces a resonance in all four of our functions at once.[63]

For Jung, the transcendent function of the psyche is therefore to synthesize pairs of opposites in a symbol.[64] There is a sense of wholeness that is anticipated by the psyche in the form of spontaneous or autonomous symbols of unity and totality. For Jung, the Self is a psychic image of the wholeness of the person.[65] The mandala is a symbol that signifies this wholeness of the Self.[66] These spontaneous symbols of the self, or of wholeness, cannot in practice be distinguished fromm a God-image.[67]

Jung thought that Freud's use of the term "symbol" had nothing to do with the symbol. He says that Freud should have said "symptom" or "metaphor" instead.[68] Jung saw Freud's assessment of psychic phenomena as being mechanistic.[69] The mechanistic-causal viewpoint regards a psychic event or a symbol as the product of previous events. A symbol interpreted in this causal way is merely a sign, with a fixed meaning.[70]

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anubhava than logical demonstrations." Paul Hacker: *Philology and Confrontation*, ed. Wilhelm Halbfass (State University of New York, 1995), p. 77.

[63] Jolande Jacobi: *Complex/Archetype/Symjbol in the Psychology of C.G. Jung* (Princeton, 1959), p. 88. The four functions are thought, feeling, sensation and intuition.

[64] *Ibid*., p. 99.

[65] Letter to Gebhard Frei (13.1.48), *C.G. Jung Letters*, vol. 1, p. 487.

[66] *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, ed. Aniela Jaffé (New York: Pantheon Books, 1961), p. 335.

[67] C.G. Jung: *Aion*, (Princeton, 1978, first published 1959), p. 40, para. 73.

[68] Letter to Kurt Plachte (10.1.29). *C.G. Jung Letters*, ed. Gerhard Adler, (Princeton, 1973), Vol. 1, p. 62.

[69] Freud's reductionism was one reason he could not continue to collaborate with him. See Letter from C.G. Jung to Smith Ely Jelliffe (24.2.36), *C.G. Jung Letters* p. 211.

[70] This is how he saw Freud's use of symbol.

But even symbols can lose their effectiveness over time. Jung says that a symbol that is petrified but is continued to be used when the situation changes becomes an idol. It then merely makes us unconscious and provides no explanation and enlightenment.[71] Jung says,

> A symbol really lives only when it is the best and highest expression for something divined but not yet known to the observer. It then compels his unconscious participation and has a life-giving and life-enhancing effect.[72]

Abhishiktānanda's ideas on symbol are very similar. Abhishiktānanda interprets in a Jungian sense the statement by Aurobindo's that the myths and rites recorded in the Vedas are above all symbols.[73] He says that Christian beliefs must be interpreted in terms of symbol (which does not mean that they are not true). Even the uniqueness of Christ is part of the Christian symbol.[74] As symbol, it must not be confined to sign. He says that when the attention of the believer is focused solely on the sign, it loses its diaphanous quality and becomes a screen, and leads to idolatry, which is the cult of the image for the sake of the image itself, the idea for the sake of the idea itself.[75] In other words, the sign must point beyond itself to the experience. To see the sign only as sign, and not as symbol pointing beyond itself, is idolatry.

The importance of Jung's idea of symbol for Abhishiktānanda is emphasized in one of the very last letters he wrote, where he also makes explicit reference to Jung:

> When the diksha [initiation of his disciple Chaduc] took place, I realized so much that it was so much more than a simple sign. We might say, a "symbol' in the language of Jung, in religious terms a 'mystery'.[76]

As we have seen, one of the symbols that Abhishiktānanda uses to describe his *advaitic* experience in the symbol of the Grail (he refers to it as an archetype).[77] It is fascinating that

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[71] See Jung's Letter to Kurt Plachte, (10.1.29). *C.G. Jung Letters*, ed. Gerhard Adler (Princeton, 1973), vol. 1, pp. 59-62. Jung says, "For me a symbol is the sensuously perceptible *expression of an inner experience.* A religious experience strives for expression and can be expressed only "symbolically" because it transcends understanding."

[72] "Psychological Types", *Collected Works*, Vol. 6, p. 476, para. 819.

[73] *Saccidānanda*, p. 55.

[74] *Diary*, p. 314 (3.7.70).

[75] "Archetypes religieux, expérience du soi et théologie chrétienne" (1970) *Intériorité*, p. 189.

[76] *Letters*, p. 313 (JS, 20.9.73).

[77] *Diary*, (11.9.73), p. 386.

when Jung was in India, he also had a very significant dream of the Grail.[78] Jung called the myth of the Grail a "primordial European dream" ("ureuropaischer Traum"). Jung, too, saw the Grail as a symbol of finding the self.[79] Jung would have written more about the Grail, but left it to his wife Emma to write about it.[80]

E. Archetypes

1. Jung's explanation of archetypes

Jung says that archetypes are the origin of symbols and of certain ideas that exist almost everywhere and at all times.[81] Jung believed that similar archetypes could be found in different cultures that have not influenced each other.[82] The source of the archetypes is the "collective consciousness."[83].

Some archetypes enumerated by Jung are the Shadow, the Anima and Animus, and the Self. The individual does not make these archetypes—archetypes just happen to him or her. They even force themselves on one's individual consciousness. Our psyche is not just something individual to us and within our control. The psyche in fact is something that controls us

Jung believed that the Self is a central, unifying archetype–an archetype around which all other archetypes are grouped and by which they are ordered. Symbols of the Self cannot be distinguished empirically from a God-image. Both the image of the Self and the image of God

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[78] C.G. Jung: *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, ed. Aniela Jaffé (New York: Vintage, 1989, first published 1961), pp. 280-283. Stories of the Grail had been important to him since the age of 15 (see p. 165).

[79]Ean Begg suggests that for C.G. Jung, the Grail was no less than the *principium individuationis*, that in us which strives to realize itself and become conscious. ", "The Grail", *Gnosis* (Spring, 1999), vol. 51.

[80] Emma Jung and Marie-Louise von Franz: *The Grail Legend* (Boston: Sigo Press, 1986, originally published in 1960 as *Die Graalslegend in psychologischer Sicht.* Jung says that he did not wish to intrude on his wife's work. Otherwise he would have written more extensively on the Grail. *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, ed. Aniela Jaffé (New York: Vintage, 1989), p. 215.

[81] C.G. Jung: "Psychology and Religion", *Collected Works,* Vol. 11, par. 5, p. 7.

[82] Krüger refers to archetypes as "homoversals". These are universal patterns of thought that arise because of our similar human natures across various cultures. *Along Edges*, p. 280.

[83] Krüger sees a Buddhist parallel to the collective unconscious: "Jung's theorem of the collective unconscious was anticipated by the Buddhist Yogacara school with its concept of the *ālaya-vijñāna*–('storehouse consciousness'), which accounts for the fact that all people of all times perceive things in largely similar ways." *Along Edges,* p. 285.

express a level of wholeness and unity that transcends consciousness.[84] Although archetypes of the Self emerge in our consciousness in the process of individuation, the Self itself precedes our consciousness. Jung says that whether we call the principle of existence 'God', 'matter', 'energy', or anything else we like, we have created nothing: we have simply changed a symbol. He says that the materialist is a metaphysician *malgré lui.*[85]

2. Abhishiktānanda's reliance on the idea of archetypes

Abhishiktānanda frequently uses Jung's idea of archetypes. From 1957 to 1971, the subsidiary notes of Abhishiktānanda's *Diary* are grouped by themes. The first theme is that of archetypes, and particularly that of the archetype of the God-Man.[86] He compares this archetype to what he regards as the Hindu equivalent: the archetype *theos-anthropos* [God-man] is *hari-hara-Purusha* [God as union of Vishnu and Shiva-Human Beings].[87]

Abhishiktānanda wrote an entire article on the subject of archetypes.[88] He says that archetypes are at the origin of human consciousness. They are "fundamental drives of being."[89] He says that the surge of the energy of nature towards Self manifests itself in archetypes such as the sacred and the numinous. These religious archetypes (e.g. Light, Holiness) subsequently find expression in myths, then in concepts, ethical laws and ritual formulas.[90] In Abhishiktānanda's opinion, the archetype is therefore pre-conceptual. It is therefore much closer to the primary zones of consciousness than our concepts.[91] Archetypes are the first *expression* of our primary

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[84] From Jung's lecture "Indische Parallelen" (7.10.31), cited in Introduction to *The Psychology of Kundalini Yoga: Notes of the Seminar Given in 1932 by C.G. Jung* (Princeton: Bollingen, 1996), p. xiii.

[85] C.G. Jung: "On the Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation", *Collected Works,* Vol. 11, p. 477, paras. 762 and 763.

[86] Odette Baumer-Despeigne: "The Spiritual Way of Henri Le Saux Swami Abhishiktānanda", *Bulletin of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue*, 1993, vol. 48, Oct., p. 21.

[87] *Diary*, p. 323 (24.11.70).

[88] "Archétypes religieux, expérience du soi et théologie chrétienne", *Intériorité*, p. 177, (22.7.70, Gyansu).

[89] A likely source of this idea of drives (*pulsions*) of being is Rudolf *Otto's Mysticism East and West*, p. 14: "We maintain that in mysticism there are indeed strong primal impulses working in the human soul which as such are completely unaffected by differences of climate, of geographical position or race."

[90] *Ibid.* pp. 177, 178.

[91] *Diary*, p. 289 (23.11.66).

intuitive consciousness. This expression of our intuition is necessary to attain the level of psychological consciousness. But the expression limits the intuition and its force.[92]

Abhishiktānanda says that archetypes are psychic realities. They are real, not so much real outside the 'mind' as at the source of the '*mind*'.[93] Archetypes are mirrors, points of condensation of mystery. Initially they are spontaneous expressions of mystery; they become organized in concepts.

Abhishiktānanda agrees that there is a God archetype. The Father in Himself is ineffable and does not have a name.[94] Even the name "Father" is a symbol. Christ himself is also an archetype. This Christ archetype shows a "triple tension." There is a tension between (1) *ātman* and *Brahman*, (2) the *Purusha* I am conscious of phenomenally and the *Purusha* at the other shore of the heart, which I am in reality and (3) between the individual that I am and the totality.

3. Going beyond the archetype

Abhishiktānanda says that we must go beyond symbols to the archetypes:

> In these days evolution is tending towards an awakening at the level of the archetypes themselves. But who is capable of an awakening beyond symbols?"[95]

As discussed, Abhishiktānanda says that the archetype is the first expression of the experience. Therefore in going beyond the symbol to the archetype, one gets closer to the experience. But Abhishiktānanda also says that one must go beyond the archetypes themselves to reach the mystery that is expressed in the archetype. Abhishiktānanda believes that that all the archetypes of consciousness and the cosmos must be transcended.[96]

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[92] "Archétypes religieux, expérience du soi et théologie chrétienne", *Intériorité*, p. 183.

[93] *Diary*, p. 154 (29.7.56).

[94] Archétypes religieux, expérience du soi et théologie chrétienne", (1970), *Intériorité*, p. 188. In "Théologoumenon Upasana (méditation) sur la Trinité", *Intériorité*, p. 233, he says that the Father is a limit that can never be thought directly.

[95] *Diary*, p. 373 (17.2.72).

[96] *Diary*, p. 123 (5.9.55). Wilber also says that true mysticism is beyond even the archetypes or *vāsanās*. It is a *nirvikalpa* experience, not *savikalpa*. Ken Wilber: The *Marriage of Sense and Soul*, p. 271.

What does this mean, to go beyond the archetypes? Jung discussed this in his interview with the Zen Buddhist Hisamatsu.[97] Hisamatsu wanted Jung to affirm that the Self beyond ego can be known. Jung replied that perhaps only half of the Self can be known; the rest remains unconscious. This did not satisfy Hisamatsu, who pressed Jung to agree that our suffering can be discarded all at one stroke. Jung's response was that we can reduce suffering, but that we need some suffering to make life interesting. Hisamatsu asked again whether we can be awakened to the Original Self who is not bound, and our self be released from the collective unconscious and the bondage deriving from it. Jung then says that we can be freed from the collective unconscious:

> Through liberation, man must be brought to a point where he is free from the compulsion to chase after a myriad of things or from being controlled by the collective unconscious. Both are fundamentally the same: *Nirvāna*![98]

What does Jung mean by "free" from the unconscious? One interpretation is that we are free from being bound to a particular archetype when we bring it into consciousness. We are then no longer being controlled by that part of the unconscious. On this view, the freedom relates to what is conscious. The ego is free from what it has consciously assimilated from the unconscious.[99]

In the same interview with Hisamatsu, Jung uses Hindu terminology to describe the Self:

> My "Self" corresponds to *Ātman* or *Puruṣa.* The personal *Ātman* corresponds to the Self. The individual Ātman is, at the same time, a super-individual *Ātman* man. In other words, my 'self' is at the same time "Self itself" [non-individual Self]. According to my terminology, "Self" is the counterpart who works against "ego." What you [Hisamatsu] call "self" is for me "ego." And what I call "Self" is the whole, and *Ātman*.[100]

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[97]Reproduced in *Self and Liberation: The Jung/Buddhism Dialogue*, ed. Daniel J. Meckel and Robert L. Moore (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), pp. 101-118.

[98] *Ibid.* , p. 111.

[99] See Peter Homans: *Jung in Context: Modernity and the Making of a Psychology* (University of Chicago, 1979).

[100] *Self and Liberation: the Jung/Buddhism Dialogue*, ed. Daniel J. Meckel and Robert L. Moore (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), p. 112. Thus, Jung would not agree with Abhishiktānanda's assessment that the Self corresponds to the third state of consciousness, deep sleep.

Hisamatsu left the dialogue not quite sure what to make of Jung's answers. He was gratified by the response that we can be freed from the unconscious. But he seemed to want an affirmation of a True Self beyond even Jung's Self.[101]

4. Necessity but relativity of Archetypes

Abhishiktānanda says that our theology must be based on the experience of the self, and not on the religious archetypes.[102] The religious archetypes are incapable of giving to us the totality the mystery of humans, of the universe and of God. The experience of the self is prior to its expressions in archetypes, and it is something more essential and original. Abhishiktānanda speaks of the necessity of "going beyond" the archetypes. In my view, he believes that this is done in the *advaitic* experience, and specifically in the *kevala*. But in the return of the *sahaja* experience, archetypes are still necessary, although relativized:

> What is required of man now, in this precise moment of his cultural and religious evolution, is to go beyond the archetypes at the basis itself of his consciousness–the passage to the other shore of the heart" as the Upanishads say–and to rediscover the original force of his being in his own origin, before any kind of manifestation that tends to be delivered and expressed mentally in myths and concepts.
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> This is not to say that man would be capable of living, i.e., of thinking and acting, without the aid of the myths and archetypes. It suffices to reflect on the problem of language, and on the almost alienating conditioning that operates in individuals and human groups. Nevertheless, man having become of age, as one likes to say in our time, must recognize in the archetype as in its mythico-conceptual expression their indispensability and their relativity.[103]

It is not so much doing away with all archetypes but of recognizing their indispensability and their relativity. Abhishiktānanda says that we must stop our normal practice of contesting one archetype by another. Instead we must recognize that they complement each other even when they confront each other. In relativizing not only the expressions of the archetypes, but also the archetypes themselves, Abhishiktānanda seems to differ from Jung's own ideas. Jung distinguishes between the archetypes as forms, and their changing contents.

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[101] Some Buddhists would see Hisamatsu's comments as assuming a hypostatization of the Self.

[102] "Archétypes religieux, expérience du soi et théologie chrétienne"(1970), *Intériorité,* p. 184.

[103] "Archétypes religieux, expérience du soi et théologie chrétienne", (1970) *Intériorité*, p. 182. My translation.

Archetypes are relativized by becoming aware of them in the first place, that is, by becoming more conscious. Because archetypes are pre-conscious, getting in touch with the archetypes and with the collective unconscious can in some ways be compared to obtaining an unconstructed awareness of reality. He says that Jung was right that only a few people are strong enough to be confronted directly with the archetypes.[104] We fear our essential mystery; "the archetype is too brilliant to be seen face to face."[105]

Like the *sahaja* state, archetypes also give a sense of oneness. Jung says that archetypes give rise to archaic thought-forms imbued with 'ancestral' or 'historic' feeling, and, beyond these feelings, the sense of indefiniteness, timelessness, and oneness. Abhishiktānanda says that people discover their unity [*ekatvam*] through archetypal symbols.[106] Abhishiktānanda says that these archetypes liberate psychical energy that is extraordinarily powerful. But this energy is within a limited "circle of radiance". These circles are vague in an age when people live in myths. But the energy becomes "dangerously precise" in an age of *logos*, which insists on defining concepts. Archetypes eventually crystallize into rituals and ethical rules. The mission of the prophets, the rishis, of Buddha, of the Sufis, and of Jesus was to show that these archetypes do not reveal the mystery of man, the universe and God. In other words, their mission was to relativize these archetypes. The Buddha expressed in drastically negative terms his dazzling (*éblouissante*) intuition of the inaccessibility of the mystery of being. The Sufis liberated Islam from literalism. This was also the mission of Jesus; law is in service of humanity and not humanity in service of law.

One reason that Abhishiktānanda gives for the necessity of going beyond the archetypes is that they are marked by our conditioning:

> As has been shown so clearly by psycho-analysis and modern structuralism, every concept, however abstract, as well as the value-judgment that accompanies it, is inevitably marked by strong underlying mental attitudes—our archetypes, our modes of speech, in short, all our hereditary and environmental

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[104] "Archétypes religieux, expérience du soi et théologie chrétienne," (1970) *Intériorité* p. 178. See also *Diary*, p. 185 (30.11.56).

[105] Odette Baumer-Despeigne: "The Spiritual Way of Henri Le Saux Swami Abhishiktānanda", *Bulletin of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue*, 1993, vol. 48, Oct., p. 21.

[106] *Diary*, p. 372 (17.2.73).

> conditioning—without which no one can in fact progress humanly or spiritually.[107]

This statement that the archetypes are conditioned is different from Jung's view. In Jung's psychology, the archetypes are form without content. They are constellated in an individual's life and receive content in symbolic form according to that person's cultural situation. Thus, the symbols or expressions of the archetype are culturally conditioned, but the archetypes are not.

Abhishiktānanda expresses this idea of cultural conditioning in a manner closer to Jung when he discusses the Christ archetype. He says that the mystery of Jesus must not be identified with any particular sociological *expressions* of the religious archetypes. Humanists are often attracted to Jesus but are discouraged by the difficulty of disengaging his mystery from the sociological interpretation given by the Churches.[108] The archetypal reality is also more important than its expression in history. Christ is less real in his temporal history than in the essential mystery of my being.[109] "I only am when I have reached myself in my archetype, the Risen One, the Anointed One, the Christ."[110]

Abhishiktānanda says that sometimes symbols are no longer adequate. Over time, a community relies on what it regards as authoritative records and pronouncements of its religious beliefs, but it no longer knows the experience that lies at the source of these symbols. If there is no present experience, these doctrines lose their meaning. The formulations are "second-hand."[111] In that case, new symbols are needed that are less remote from the invisible archetypes and more meaningful to modern hearts.[112] For example, the God archetype no longer functions well in our time:

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[107] Preface, *Guru*, p. ix.

[108] "Archétypes religieux, expérience du soi et théologie chrétienne", *Intériorité*, p. 180.

[109] *Diary*, p. 287 (26.10.66).

[110] *Diary*, p. 223 (8.11.59).

[111] *Diary*, p. 345 (24.4.72). Cf. *Tripura Rahasya* 18: 89,90 re "second-hand" experience.

[112] *Diary*, p. 373 (17.2.73).

> The archetype *theos* "functions" less and less well, at our end of the Neolithic era, as a way of expressing, focussing, grounding, etc., the "religious sense" of modern people.[113]

In his view, modern atheism is opposed just to the archetype *theos*, and not to the mystery that is expressed by *theos*. Humanism also contests the expression of these religious archetypes. Humanism's error is its failure to recognize its own continuing mythology. Even the atheist has his or her own myths and humanist archetypes despite their scientific and rationalist masks.

Abhishiktānanda says that religious archetypes like *theos* emerge in response to differing societal impulses. A thorough liberation from these dogmatic and canonical formulations takes place once the believer has the intuition of "pure faith", or of the pure consciousness of himself or herself:

> Every theology, like every institution (canon law) depends on a system of thought and a social system, that is, on conceptual and sociological formulations (no-emes and socio-emes), on archetypal drives whose emergence is strictly conditioned by the constantly shifting impetus of human groups as they are situated in time and space.[114]

Like Jung, Abhishiktānanda encouraged a person to stay with his or her own religion, and not to try to jump into another. One should try to re-interpret the symbols to get back in touch with the experience and make the symbols live again. He says that we must try to reduce the sclerosis of the religious archetypes, to combat their conceptual and sociological sedimentation, to find the interior source at the place where it arises.[115]

Recognizing the relativity of archetypes as well as their necessity means that some archetypes will remain. Abhishiktānanda says that some archetypes are more fundamental than others. The most fundamental archetype is the Self, the *Aham*, the *Purusha, ātman, Brahman*, the I.[116] It is more fundamental than the religious or humanistic archetypes.[117] The self is an

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[113] *Diary*, p. 323 (24.11.70). If the opposition is to *theos* and not the mystery it expresses, we may question whether he means the God archetype or the cultural expression of that archetype.

[114] *Diary*, p. 333 (11.12.71). Here it is the emergence of the archetypes themselves that is culturally conditioned.

[115] "Archétypes religieux, expérience du soi et théologie chrétienne," (1970) *Intériorité*, p. 179.

[116] "Appel à l'intériorité", *Intériorité*, p. 170. It is unclear whether fundamental archetypes can be relativized.

[117] "Archétypes religieux, expérience du soi et théologie chrétienne" (1970) *Intériorité,* p. 190. Wilber says that the archetype of the Self is the only transpersonal archetype. *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality* (Boston: Shambhala, 1995), p. 594.

experience of totality.[118] It is expressed by various symbols, myths and concepts. The various spiritual paths (*mārga*) purify these expressions of the self. The path of action (*karm yoga)* does this by the idea of disinterested action that liberates the self from the limitation of the ego. In *bhakti*, the affective path, we project the self in the gods [*devāta*], transforming the self by the sacrificial fire or the fire of love. And in the path of *jñāna*, we purify the intellect in the *upāsana* [dogmas], meditation and silence and in the *guru*.

5. The relativity and necessity of concepts

Just as some fundamental archetypes remain, so also not every name and form, *nāmarūpa* can be avoided. The enlightened person still lives in the world, and some form must still remain, in order to perceive things. In our bodies we experience nonduality in these names and forms themselves. Abhishiktānanda writes to Chaduc:

> In the dazzling light of the vision of Being, you have perhaps been over-strict in rejecting all the *nāmarūpas.* And yet, in the *śarīram* that we bear, it is in the experience of these *nāmarūpas* itself that we discover the *advaita* and the *kaivalyam* of the Absolute. If we set them in opposition, we have lost our way.[119]

It is important to recognize as *nāmarūpa* all that we previously considered to be the most sacred, and all that we considered to be the very Truth contained in 'words'. By recognizing these words as *nāmarūpa*, they are relativized. But later we have to also recognize that words are necessary. We have to be able to recognize the value of the *nāmarūpa*, not less than we did 'before'. But we have discovered another level of truth—the blinding sun of high noon."[120] In this relativizing, we see new meanings where we did not see them before:

> …coming back to the N.T. Scriptures after an immersion in the Upanishads, you discover new depths in Paul and John. But what a disconcerting difference in language! You cannot attempt to make comparisons at the surface level. You have to go beyond the words to the still unformulated archetypes.[121]

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[118] Preface, *Guru*, p. xii. This was also Jungs's view. M. Abe criticizes this view of totality as a hypostatization of the Self. M. Abe: "The self in Jung and Zen" in DJ Meckel & RL Moore, *Self and liberation: The Jung/Buddhism dialogue* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), pp. 128-140.

[119] *Letters*, p. 294 (MC, 12.4.73).

[120] *Letters*, pp. 284-285 (MC, 26.1.73).

[121] *Letters*, p. 278 (OB 21.11.72).

It is therefore impossible to suppress *nāmarūpa*. Abhishiktānanda says that truth does not consist in suppressing *nāmarūpa* but in living them, while piercing through them. That is the greatness of the Upanishads.[122]

The archetypes must be integrated into life. Abhishiktānanda calls this "swallowing the experience".

> [Humans] experience their archetypes and their levels of consciousness under sacramental symbols that are cosmic, historic and social. They are sacramental in the sense that in them a person arrives at the integration of his own being, he literally "swallows" them because they express what he can only feel very confusedly in himself; in some sense he discovers himself as himself through contact with them.[123]

Swallowing the archetype is to integrate it into life. We can compare Abhishiktānanda's idea of "swallowing" the experience with the story that Jung relates of meeting a disciple of Ramakrishna in India. The man was a primary school teacher. Jung says that he had absorbed the wisdom of his master but had at the same time surpassed him because he had "eaten" the world. He had not sought to escape *māyā* by living in the cosmic Self but was living out the experience in the world. Jung saw him as an example of how wisdom, holiness *and* humanity can dwell together in harmony. What impressed Jung was the man's integration.[124]

Abhishiktānanda says that our intuition must be 'conceived' or absorbed if it is to penetrate in full force all the levels of being.[125] Conceptual formulations can help in awakening archetypes in our intuition:

> Religious truths and formulations do not reach the mind of the listener as if it were simply blank a *tabula rasa*. They meet in his mind something which is already there, even if only latent. They aim at awakening the mind, at helping it to bring into view intuitions which so far may have remained at the archetypal level.[126]

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[122] *Letters*, p. 273 (MC, 26.6.72).

[123] *Diary*, p. 122 (5.9.55).

[124] "The Holy Men of India", *Psychology and the East*, (Princeton, 1978). Jung writes that the man was a disciple of Ramaṇa. In a later letter, Jung acknowledges that he was in error, and that the man was a disciple of Ramakrishna. See Jung's letter to Gualthernus H. Mees (15.9.47). *C.G. Jung Letters,* Vol. 1, p. 478.

[125] "The Upanishads, an Introduction", *Further Shore*, p. 97.

[126] Abhishiktānanda: "The Depth-Dimension of Religious Dialogue", *Vidyajyoti* (1981) Vol. 45 No. 5, p. 204. Thus, even the dualism of concepts can serve a purpose.

He says that religious truths point to what is already there. The call of Being pierces one to the heart, and there releases the most secret archetypes which are waiting for you in the depths of your psyche.[127] When we reach the Self, the archetypes are set free and release themselves through symbols.[128]

In all these passages, Abhishiktānanda seems to be saying that "going beyond the archetypes" really means relativizing them, seeking the more fundamental archetypes, going to the basic experience, and becoming conscious of that which was previously unconscious. It is an integration of these archetypes, including the shadow, or 'dark side.'[129] Abhishiktānanda asks whether Paul was incapable of definitive experience of Ramana. Paul was obliged to live in contact with fundamental archetype under forms unable to transcend the transference onto an "other" of his experience of "be-ing". Because of this projection onto an other, Paul was thus also unable to transcend his experience of mortality and sin. Abhishiktānanda says Paul was unable to integrate his 'dark side'.

All these ways of describing "going beyond archetypes" are in accord with Jung's method of individuation. They refer to our becoming more conscious of what was unconscious. Abhishiktānanda writes "The more conscious a being is, the more Christ is in it." He says that Jesus was the man in whom consciousness reached its ultimate depth.[130] In fact, greater consciousness is the goal of the whole universe:

> The goal of the universe is the consciousness of being, the final unveiling of the intuition that constitutes the human being.[131]

This goal of greater consciousness is quite different from seeking cessation of consciousness. As he said of Mehta's view of meditation, there is a passing both to the subconscious and the supra-conscious.[132]

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[127] *Secret*, p. 121.

[128] *Diary*, p. 233 (12.6.60).

[129] *Diary*, 225, Nov/59

[130] *Diary*, p. 103 (6.7.55).

[131] *Diary*, p. 286 (22.10.66).

[132] *Diary*, p. 107 (28.7.55).

F. Superconsciousness and Identification with Brahman

1. Jung and Kundalini yoga

To better understand Jung's ideas of self and consciousness, it is helpful to look at his seminar on Kundalini yoga.[133] Jung used Kundalini yoga as a model of the development of higher consciousness. He gives a psychological understanding of yoga and the *cakras*. The *cakras* are symbolic depictions of our inner experience and the individuation process. Kundalini is the development of the non-ego life. The non-ego is the suprapersonal. We awaken Kundalini to begin the development of the suprapersonal within the individual, and "in order to make clear to the individual spark of consciousness the light of the gods."

The first *cakra, mūlādhāra*, symbolizes the situation of modern European consciousness. This is a condition where humans seem to be the only power, and the gods, or the impersonal non-ego powers, are inefficient, or sleeping; this is the world of *māyā*.

Individuation begins with the fourth *cakra, anāhata*. We become aware of psychical realities, and of the fact that our substance is not only our personal self, but the substance of others, too. But our awareness of these realities is in terms of other people and other objects. We project our selves into those others; our "shadow" side is projected in them, and we do not acknowledge it is our own.

In the fifth *cakra, viśuddha*, we admit that psychical facts have nothing to do with objects around us. They have a reality of their own.

Jung says that based on the symbolism in Kundalini, we can construct something about the sixth *cakra*. In this center, the ego disappears completely:

> The God that has been dormant in *mūlādhāra* is here fully awake, the only reality; and therefore this center has been called the condition in which one unites with *Śiva*. One could say it was the center of the *unio mystica* with the power of God, meaning that absolute reality where one is nothing but psychic reality, yet

[133] C.G. Jung: *The Psychology of Kundalini Yoga: Notes of the Seminar Given in 1932 by C.G. Jung,* ed. Sonu Shamdasani (Princeton, 1996). Jung himself practiced some yoga exercises for a time.

> confronted with the psychic reality that one is not. And that is God. God is the eternal psychical object. God is simply a word for the non-ego.[134]

This sixth *cakra* is a state of complete consciousness, not only self-consciousness but an exceedingly extended consciousness which includes everything–energy itself–a consciousness which knows not only "That is Thou" but more than that–every tree, every stone, every breath of air, every rat's tail–all that is yourself; there is nothing that is not yourself.[135]

But Jung says that the seventh *cakra* (the *sahasrāra*) is

> …merely a philosophical concept…there is no experience because it is one, it is without a second. It is dormant, it is not, and therefore it is *nirvāṇa.* This is an entirely philosophical concept, a mere logical conclusion from the premises before.

Jung therefore denies that a transcendental self would be conscious. We could not even know that we are experiencing it.[136]

2. Superconsciousness and *nirvikalpa samādhi*

Jung discusses the Hindu idea of liberation. He says that he cannot not imagine a consciousness without a subject. In 1938 Jung wrote in a letter:

> It is certainly desirable to liberate oneself from the operation of opposites but one can only do it to a certain extent, because no sooner do you get out of the conflict than you get out of life altogether. So that liberation can be only a very partial one. It can be the construction of a consciousness just beyond the opposites. Your head may be liberated, your feet remain entangled. Complete liberation means death. What I call 'consciousness' would coincide with what you call 'mind.' […]
>
> If you eradicate the ego completely, there is nobody left that would consciously experience. Too much ego always leads to a state of conflict, therefore it ought to be abolished. But it is the same thing as with the pairs of opposites: if you abolish the ego altogether, then you create unconsciousness. One assumes however that there is a consciousness without ego, a sort of consciousness of the atman. I'm

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[134] *Ibid*. p. 57.

[135] This sounds like the description of *sahaja* consciousness.

[136] Cf. W. Pauli: "In place of the objectless pan-consciousness of the Orient, Western psychology has set up the concept of the unconscious." "Die philosophische Bedeutung der Idee der Komplemntarität", *Experientia*, VL, Basel 1950, p. 72ff, cited by C.A. Meier: *Consciousness*, (Sigo Press, 1989), pp. 9-10.

> afraid this supreme consciousness is at least not one we could possess. Inasmuch as it exists, we do not exist.[137]

This is really the same issue that we have discussed for Abhishiktānanda. It is the issue between *nirvikalpa samādhi* and the liberation in the body of the *jīvanmukti*. How can we say that there is a consciousness without a subject when the *jīvanmukti* is alive and participating in the world? Abhishiktānanda says that one may die in the *nirvikalpa* (or *kevala*) experience. Thus, Jung's statement is true. Complete liberation means death. Even those Hindu traditions that believe in the possibility of *jīvanmukti* speak of liberation in death as higher. But the issue really is, does the one who returns to life, the *jīvanmukti,* still have some ego awareness, or some awareness as a subject?

In 1938, Jung wrote about this problem to W.Y. Evans-Wentz, the scholar of Tibetan studies. Jung agreed that there are states of intensified consciousness that deserve the name "super-consciousness." But he said he was unable to imagine a condition where there would not be something unconscious left over. He refers to Paul's experience recorded in Acts 26:13. Even in his *ekstasis*, Paul assures us that an "I" has seen the experience:

> Now if his [Paul's] ego had been completely dissolved and abolished, he never could have said "I have seen," he might have said "God has seen", or rather he would not have been able to tell us even about the fact that something had been seen at all. So no matter how far an *ekstasis* goes or how far consciousness can be extended, there is still the continuity of the apperceiving ego which is essential to all forms of consciousness.[138]

Jung therefore says that it is absolutely impossible to know what one would experience when the "I" which could experience does not exist any more. Therefore he considered it is impossible to experience *śūnyatā*. He says that there can be no consciousness without a conscious ego. There must be something left over that attains to the realization. Life always must be tackled anew.[139]

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[137] Letter to V. Subrahamanya Iyer Aug 29, 1938 in English, *C.G. Jung Letters*, ed. Gerhard Adler (Princeton, 1973), Vol. 1, p.247.

[138] Letter to W.Y. Evans-Wentz Feb. 9, 1939, in English, *C.G. Jung Letters*, ed. Gerhard Adler (Princeton, 1973), Vol. 1, p. 261.

[139] C.G. Jung: *Collected Works* vol. 8, p. 72, para 142.

In *Scacidānanda,* Abhishiktānanda also says that the process of realization continues, and that we begin again.

> The Lord's chosen one then advances from depth to depth, to inner centre after inner centre, in the mystery of Being, in the mystery of his being himself, for in this unfathomable abyss there is no last level. Gregory of Nyssa refers to this drawing of the soul ever onwards as '*epektasis*', and says that it will continue without end through an eternity of ages…[140]

In my view, the problem of whether there can be consciousness without a subject is really the same problem that we have seen between Pure Consciousness and the consciousness of the *jīvanmukta* who returns to the world. Whether or not we can attain a state beyond the archetypes or the *vāsānas*, we must return to this world (unless we die in the experience). If we return, then we are back in the world of distinctions and particulars. The mystical experience achieved by Kundalini is transient. We cannot always live in meditation. There is still some ego left. The ego may be changed by our encounter with the unconscious. We may, for example, feel more related to the world. It is an individuated ego, one that is connected with the Self. We have integrated our ego with the unconscious. And just as there is a continuing ego, so some unconscious still exists. Even Ramaṇa says that the *sahaja* consciousness has some *vāsānas*.

Does Abhishiktānanda agree that some ego remains in the *sahaja* consciousness? In some places, Abhishiktānanda speaks of a "trans-egoism."[141] In *Guhāja*, Abhishiktānanda says that egoism is proper in this world, provided that it does not separate itself off:

> Egoism is at the center of the work of man; it is the intimate motor of all his activity. Egoism is not an ignoble thing except to the extent it limits itself, closes itself and separates itself; in realizing himself man realizes the world, and it is in placing his mark on the universe, achieving his place in the creative work that part which God did not wish to accomplish without him…[142]

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[140] *Saccidānanda*, p. 175. As we have seen, Panikkar praises this idea of *epektasis*.

[141] *Diary*, p. 241(1961). He says that there is a trans-egoism, trans-*ahamkāra,* which has passed into the divine *aham*.

[142] *Guhāja*, p. 110.

In *Guhāja* he also says that for the Christian it is not an illusion to believe oneself distinct from the world and from God, but it is an illusion to think myself distinct in the way we usually imagine it.[143]

G. Teleology

1. Jung's idea of teleology

I have discussed Abhishiktānanda view of a teleology in the evolution from the Unmanifested and involution returning to it. It is clear that Jung also has this kind of teleology. As discussed, he says that the Self is both the source and goal of our psychic development. Like Abhishiktānanda, Jung refers to the Pleroma from which we came and to which we return.[144] He sees the aim of human development as bringing about an approach to and connection between the specific nature of the non-ego and the conscious ego. Jung says that the Self is the cause of what is evolved. It "prefigures" that which evolves out of it:

> The self, like the unconscious, is an *a priori* existent out of which the ego evolves. It is, so to speak, an unconscious prefiguration of the ego. It is not I who create myself, rather I happen to myself.[145]

But if the Self is the "cause" of what is evolved, such causation must be seen as being both a material and a final cause.[146] Psychic phenomena must be looked at from "a twofold point of view, namely that of causality and that of finality.[147] Although there may be a causally connected series of events, their meaning is only intelligible in terms of end-products, or final effects (a teleology). When looked at from this final point of view, the symbol is seen as an expression of a purpose to be fulfilled. The symbol represents a definite but not yet recognizable

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[143] *Guhāja*, p. 117.

[144] See also *: The Psychology of Kundalini Yoga: Notes of the Seminar Given in 1932 by C.G. Jung,* ed. Sonu Shamdasani, (Princeton, 1996), pp. 28, 29.

[145] C.G. Jung, "Transformation Symbolism in the Mass" (1940), *Collected Works,* Vol. 11, p. 259, para. 391.

[146] As discussed, Jung saw Freud's assessment of psychic phenomena as being mechanistic. Such a mechanistic-causal viewpoint regards a psychic event or a symbol as the product of previous events. Freud therefore denies a final cause. A symbol interpreted in this causal way is merely a sign, with a fixed meaning. This reductionism was one reason Jung could not continue to collaborate with him. See Letter from C.G. Jung to Smith Ely Jelliffe, Feb 24, 1936, *C.G. Jung Letters*, Vol. 1, p. 211.

[147] C.G. Jung: "Collected Aspects of Dream Psychology", *Collected Works,* Vol. 8, p. 241, par. 456.

goal.[148] The goal of our psychic development is the Self, and the process of achieving this goal the process of "individuation." Jung proposed three ways in which this goal is made known to us: enantiodromia, synchronicity, and the directing psyche.

a) Enanantiodromia: opposition and compensation

Jung says that the unconscious compensates for the one-sidedness of our thought. Our unconscious has, fundamentally, a tendency towards wholeness. There is a balance of energy or *libido* that is maintained between the conscious and the unconscious. The conscious viewpoint results in a one-sided exaggeration, and will result in an opposing reaction from the unconscious. Whatever is manifested by the unconscious psyche in this way is usually in opposition to the contents of our consciousness. As the opposite position is taken into account and integrated by our consciousness, a third position arises. This is called the "transcendent function of consciousness." This compensatory process is aimed at our obtaining the conscious realization of the self. This process of compensation includes the idea of the shadow, and as I have shown, Abhishiktānanda makes use of this idea.

b) Synchronicity

Jung says that external events that happen to us are also compensatory, but we must be open to interpreting them in this way. Synchronicity is the "meaningful paralleling" of inner and outer events. It is an acausal orderedness that transcends space and time. The principle of synchronicity, or meaningful coincidence, shows that meaning exists not only in the human psyche, but also in the external world.[149] For example, someone may dream of a friend who has not been seen or heard from for a long time. The next day the friend comes for a visit. These "chance" events in our external world are also a way of directing us to achieve wholeness. Jung saw this understanding of synchronicity as the "key which unlocks the door to the Eastern apperception of totality that we find so mysterious."[150]

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[148] C.G. Jung: "Mysterium conuinctionis", *Collected Work*s, vol. 14, p. 468, para. 667.

[149] C.G. Jung: "Synchronicity: an Acausal Connecting principle", *Collected Works,* vol. 8, p. 482, par. 915.

[150] C.G. Jung, "Foreword to Lily Abegg: Ostasien denkt anders", *Psychology and the East,* (Princeton, 1978), p. 188, para. 1485.

Abhishiktānanda saw external events in his life as having a meaning beyond coincidence; he applied Jung's idea of synchronicity even if he did not use the term. For example, when a thief broke into his house, he saw this as an example of compensatory activity:

> I was too comfortably "settled" in the little house of Vadalur Ammal. That is why the "Self" took the form of a thief to unsettle me and invite me to this more complete stripping.[151]

He says that his trip to Bombay was only a means of causing him to meet D.K. Mehta.[152] He also sees significance in a passage he finds when randomly opening the *Bhagavad Gītā*. "I have just opened the *Gītā,* and without looking for it found Arjuna's anguish on the point of fighting against his own people."[153] Towards the end of his life, he was struck by his sister praying for help for him at the very time that he had a heart attack.[154] This may also be seen as a synchronistic event in his life.

c) The directing psyche

Jung sometimes speaks of the directing psyche as an impersonal force. He says that there is "An innate urge of life is to produce an individual as complete as possibleSo the *entelechia*, the urge of realization, naturally pushes man to be himself."[155] One's *entelechia* is the germ of life of what one is. It is important to realize our self, because otherwise the purpose of the world has been missed. "Then you must simply be thrown back into the melting pot and be born again."[156]

Sometimes Jung uses personal language to refer to this directing psyche. He says that the Hindu idea of the *purusha* is a symbol of this directing force. He speaks of the *purusha* as "a being in which you are contained, which is greater and more important than you but which has

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[151] See *Diary*, p. 77 (27.11.53).

[152] *Diary*, p. 113 (2.8.55).

[153] *Diary*, p. 204 (13.4.57).

[154] *Letters*, p. 318 (MT, 22.10.73).

[155] C.G. Jung, *The Psychology of Kundalini Yoga: Notes of the Seminar Given in 1932 by C.G. Jung,* ed. Sonu Shamdasani (Princeton, 1996), p. 4.

[156] I believe that this is as close as Jung gets to referring to reincarnation. See also *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, pp. 317-318.

an entirely psychical existence."[157] He says that the urge to be complete is the anima, the Kundalini, a spark, incentive, something that pushes us on to enlightenment. It is something superior to our own will.[158] Our ego does not choose our goal; it is chosen for us.

> The self, like the unconscious, is an *a priori* existent out of which the ego evolves. It is, so to speak, an unconscious prefiguration of the ego. It is not I who create myself, rather I happen to myself.[159]

To speak of the unconscious as choosing our goals for us is of course to use personal language. Jung says that the Hindu *purusha* [or primal Person] is a symbol that expresses these impersonal forces that are other than ourselves:

> If you function in your self you are not yourself--that is what you feel. You have to do it as if you were a stranger; you will buy as if you did not buy, you will sell as if you did not sell. Or, as St. Paul expresses it, "But it is not I that lives, it is Christ that liveth in me," meaning that his life had become an objective life, not his own life but the life of a greater one, the *purusha*.[160]

Abhishiktānanda also speaks of the Self as coordinating events that unfold in history:

> Once all those whom he wants for the work are 'ready', then all of a sudden the scattered bits of the design will come together as by magic. The Self is strongest![161]

H. Transcendence

What is meant by "transcendence" for Jung? Insofar as Jung posits a self who is beyond the ego, and a consciousness that is beyond individual consciousness, he is positing a form of the transcendent.[162] The self is more comprehensive than the ego; it includes the experience of the ego, and therefore transcends it. It is at least epistemologically transcendent in that this self

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[157] C.G. Jung, *The Psychology of Kundalini Yoga: Notes of the Seminar Given in 1932 by C.G. Jung,* ed. Sonu Shamdasani (Princeton, 1996), p. 46.

[158] *Ibid.* p. 21.

[159] C.G. Jung, "Transformation Symbolism in the Mass" (1940), *Collected Works,* Vol. 11, para. 391, p. 259.

[160] C.G. Jung, *The Psychology of Kundalini Yoga: Notes of the Seminar Given in 1932 by C.G. Jung,* ed. Sonu Shamdasani (Princeton, 1996), p. 40.

[161] *Letters*, p. 156 (MG, 3.11.63).

[162] "The psyche is a world in which our ego is contained." "Commentary on The Secret of the Golden Flower", *Psychology and the East,* (Princeton, 1978), p. 53.

beyond the ego is also something that is beyond our concepts. For Jung, it corresponds to Kant's *ding an sich* which also cannot be conceptualized.[163]

Does Jung also believe that the Self is in some sense ontologically transcendent? Chapman points out that there are three different theories of religious experience in Jung's work: the empirical, the phenomenological, and the metaphysical.[164] In many places, Jung refers to his work as empirical. It is clear that he wanted his work to be regarded as "scientific":

> Although I have often been called a philosopher, I am an empiricist and adhere as such to the phenomenological standpoint. I trust that it does not conflict with the principles of scientific empiricism if one occasionally makes certain reflections which go beyond a mere accumulation and classification of experience. As a matter of fact I believe that experience is not even possible without reflection, because "experience" is a process of assimilation without which there could be no understanding.[165]

In his later writings, Jung becomes more open to admitting the religious and mystical character of his work. Brunton relates that Jung told him that he himself had mystical experiences, but that he had to keep them to himself in order to preserve his scientific reputation.[166] And in a letter Jung writes:

> I don't want to addle anybody's brains with my subjective conjectures. Beyond that I have had experiences which are, so to speak, "ineffable," "secret" because they can never be told properly and because nobody can understand them (I don't know whether I have even approximately understood them myself), "dangerous" because 99% of humanity would declare I was mad if they heard such things from me, "catastrophic" because the prejudices aroused by their telling might block other people's way to a living and wondrous mystery, "taboo" because they are an *aduto* [holy precinct] protected by *deisidaimonia* [fear of the gods] as faithfully described by Goethe…[167]

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[163] Jung says "Every statement about the transcendental is to be avoided because it is only a laughable presumption on the part of a human mind unconscious of its limitations." ["Commentary on he Secret of the Golden Flower", *Psychology and the East* (Princeton, 1978), p. 56] Just as Kant's categories provided an a priori cognition in our conscious experience, the archetypes are the patterns of behaviour for the unconscious. But here, as Chapman points out, Jung does not follow Kant. The archetypes, which are in the unconscious, produce effects. That is something Kant could not say of anything in the noumenal world.

[164] J. Harley Chapman: *Jung's Three Theories of Religious Experience* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1988).

[165] "Psychology and Religion: "The Autonomy of the Unconscious", *Collected Works,* Vol. 11, p. 5.

[166] *The Notebooks of Paul Brunton* (Burdett, NY: Larson, 1984), vol. 8: *Reflections on my Life and Writings,* p. 214.

[167] Letter from C.G. Jung to Bernard Baur-Celio Jan 30, 1934, *C.G. Jung Letters*, Vol. 1, pp. 140, 141.

I. Tentative Conclusions

I have shown what I believe to be similarities between some of the ideas of Jung and Abhishiktānanda. These include the importance of experience over concepts and creeds, the importance of symbol, and especially the importance of archetypes and the unconscious. The distinction between *nirvikalpa* (*kevala*) and *sahaja samādhi* is helpful in resolving the problem that Jung raises about whether one can ever be conscious of attaining to superconsciousness. Both Abhishiktānanda and Jung agree that one either dies at that time, or returns to the world of concepts, archetypes and symbols. Some thinking and even some ego remain at this time. But there has been an integration with what was non-conceptual, and an increase in consciousness. This seems similar to Abhishiktānanda's comment that the *advaitic* experience results in a new consciousness, a new level of consciousness in which all ideas are seen as if for the first time.[168]

Jung's idea of the unconscious is also helpful in resolving the problem of the usefulness of meditation. Ramaṇa did not believe that a state of trance was necessary to reach the *sahaja* state. But meditation in the sense of reaching the unconscious and becoming confronted with the archetypes, even going beyond them, is valuable. What needs to be elaborated more is the effect that this has upon one's return to the world. I believe that Jung's idea of integration is helpful here to show what integration is required in the *sahaja* state.

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[168] Diary, p. 326 (20.5.71).

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